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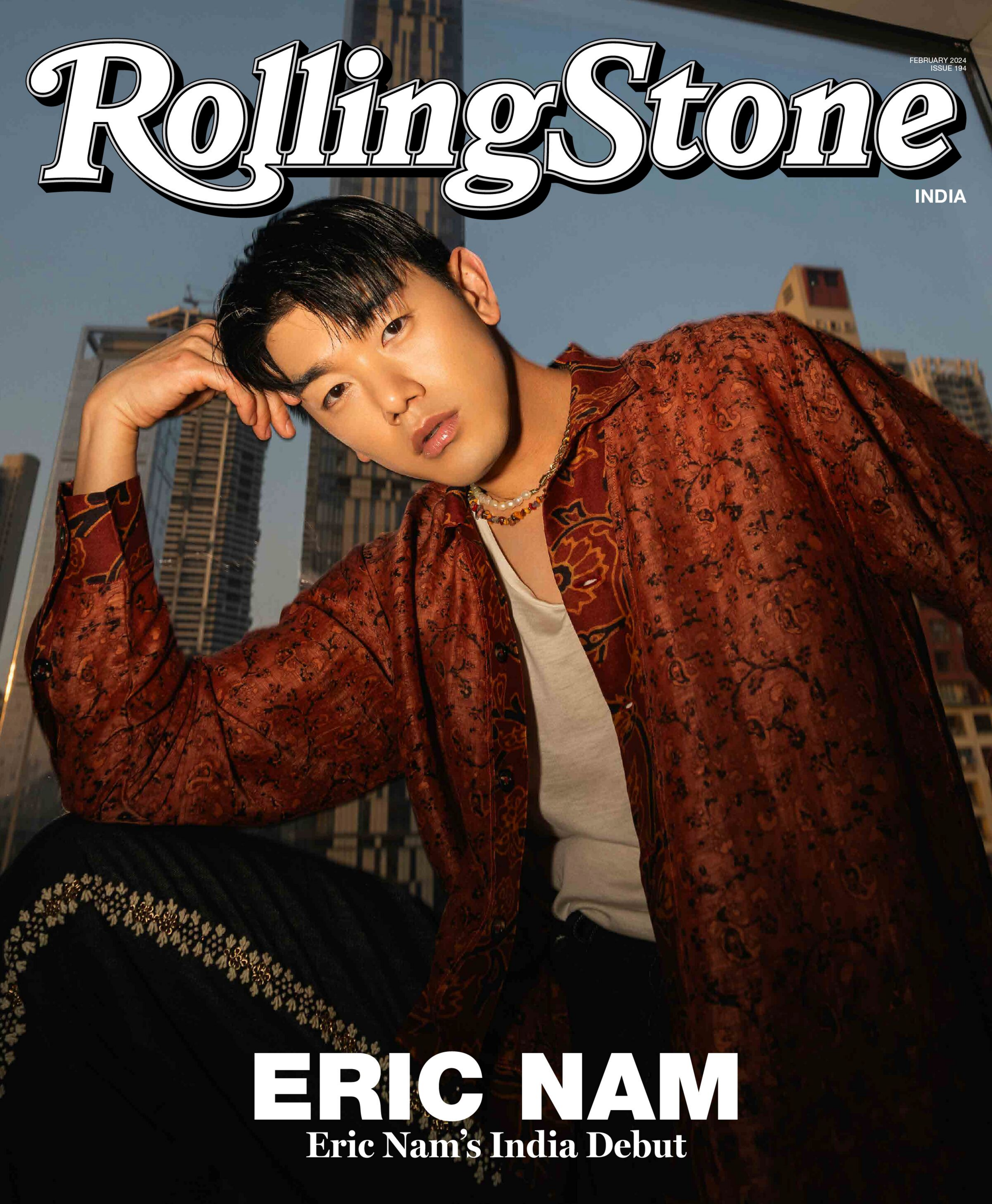
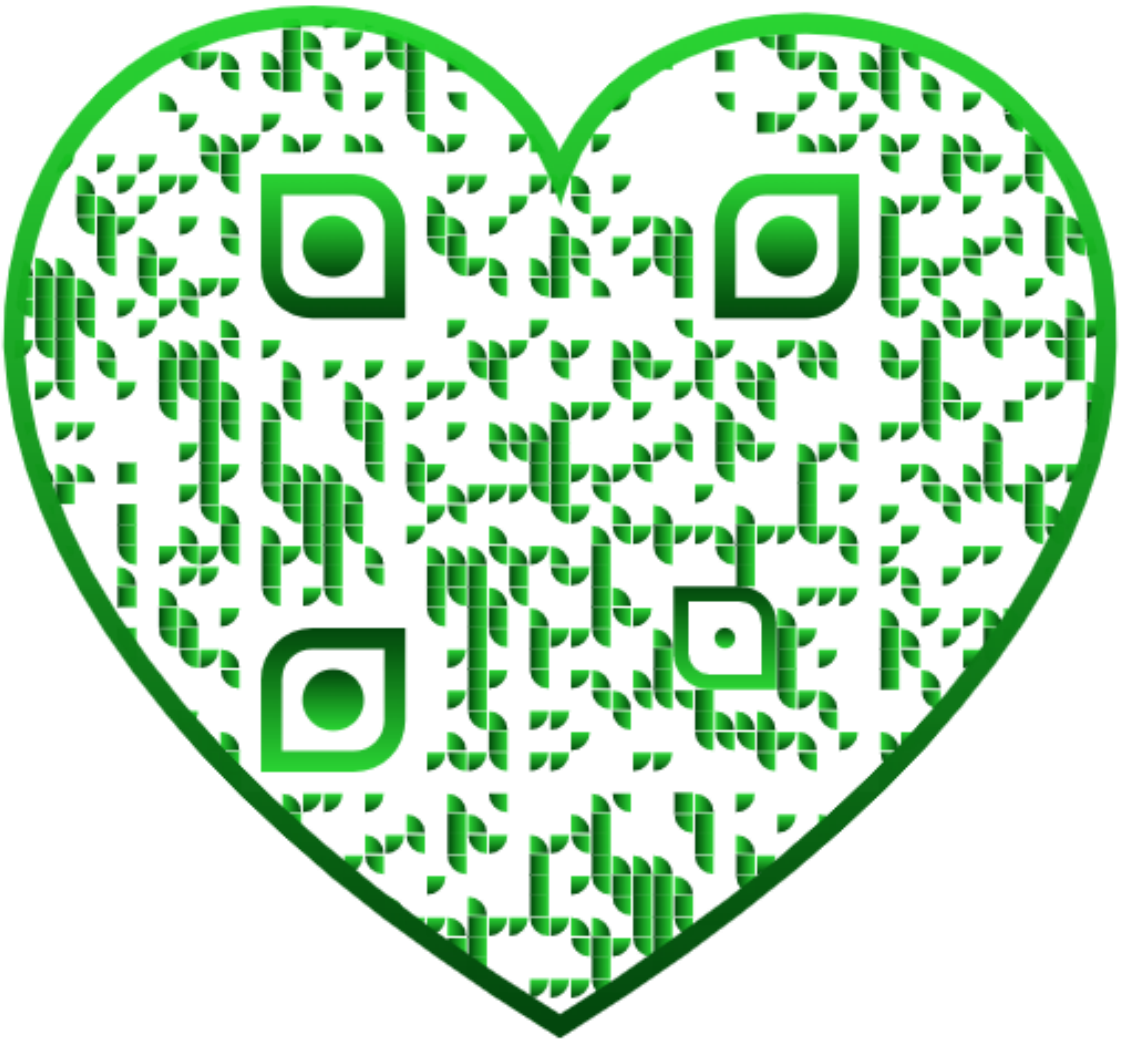
INDIA



ERIC NAM

Eric Nam's India Debut



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The director, stars, and Marley family discuss the making of the new biopic 'One Love'

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Correspondence

+ LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE

"Her [Dua Lipa's] versatility, authenticity, and empowering message resonate deeply with fans worldwide."

— Simone Pinto

Dua's Lipa's Versatility

As a devoted fan of Dua Lipa, I was thrilled to read your cover story capturing her incredible journey and impact on the music scene. Her versatility, authenticity, and empowering message resonate deeply with fans worldwide. Thank you for celebrating this remarkable artist.

SPOTLIGHT

Pavithra Chari's Creativity

Pavithra Chari's interview beautifully encapsulates the essence of creativity and its boundless possibilities. Her ability to explore various artistic outlets while challenging herself is inspiring.

- Dylan Fernandes

The Lightyears Explode's New Sound

'Suburban Prose' by The Lightyears Explode is a captivating album that delves into raw emotions, showcasing the band's evolution and depth. The article beautifully captures the essence of their music and its heartfelt expression.

- Ankit Parmar

Best of 2023

Your pieces on the best Indian albums, EPs, singles and music videos of 2023 brilliantly highlights the diverse musical landscape of the country. From Seedhe Maut to Komorebi and Ankur Tewari, each artist brings a unique voice and perspective and celebrates Indian talent.

- Preefa Rao

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Opening Act

A Room That's 'Filled With the Good Ghosts'

LEVON HELM STUDIOS are a second home for Allison Russell: In past phases of her career, the singer-songwriter has spent quite a bit of time performing or hanging out at the late Band drummer's legendary former house and performance space in Woodstock, New York. But this past fall, Russell headlined the barn as a solo artist for the first time. "When I talk about circle work, Levon Helm's studio is a prime example of that," says Russell, who performed songs from her Grammy-nominated LP *The Returner* and duetted with Helm's daughter, Amy, on "Atlantic City." "These spaces, the ones that are filled with the good ghosts, are the sacred spaces of live music." JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Russell practices before the show at Levon Helm's former home in Woodstock.

The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Madi Diaz Tells It Like It Is

Nashville's secret weapon (and Harry Styles' bandmate) levels up with an LP full of folk-pop gold

→

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Cheril Sanchez

MADI DIAZ

MAD ABOUT MADI
Diaz visiting New York in October

At this point in her career, Madi Diaz is realistic about life on the road. "I'm 37 years old, and this shit is heavy," the Nashville songwriter says with a laugh. "I'm walking through the airport and I'm carrying a lot of pedals and cables. I'm shoving my guitar in the bathroom stall." By the time she gets to the check-in counter, she's dreading the task of talking an airline employee into letting her bring her gear on board. "I'm just not a good fighter," she adds. "I'm stubborn, but I don't have the *oomph* in me anymore."

Maybe that's true when it comes to luggage, but it's definitely not applicable to Diaz's music. Just ask Harry Styles, who brought her out as an opening act for his Love on Tour shows in 2022 — and liked her so much he asked her to join his backing band. Other fans of her incredibly relatable folk pop include Angel Olsen, Muna, and Waxahatchee (all of whom collaborated with her on re-recordings of her excellent 2021 LP, *History of a Feeling*), and Kesha, who recorded a song she worked on in 2019. By all accounts, having the *oomph* is Diaz's thing.

It's an unseasonably toasty afternoon in October, and Diaz is sitting in the lobby of Manhattan's Ace Hotel, wearing a tank top under a button-down blouse. She says she's utterly sleep-deprived (she looks alert) and that her bangs look like Edward Scissorhands attacked them (they look lovely). "You can tell how well I'm doing in my actual life based on how many fucking horoscope podcasts and apps I have on my phone," she jokes. "If I have more than two, it's not good."

The night before, Diaz played the Beacon Theatre, opening for My Morning Jacket. Performing at the ornate, 94-year-old venue was a bit overwhelming. "It's so romantic, I got lost," she says. "I started trying to talk between songs, and a word literally came out backwards. I was staring at this golden-lady statue. We're playing the fucking Beacon with these insane horns. I just cannot believe my ears."

When she says "insane horns," by the way, she's referring to Styles' touring horn section: saxophonist Lorren Chiodo, trombonist Kalia Vandever, and trumpeter Laura Bibbs. "They're the sweetest, best women," Diaz says. "It was like a summer-camp reunion."

One of the songs Diaz performed with the horn section is "Same Risk," a brutally honest acoustic scorcher from her new album, *Weird Faith*: "Do you think this could ruin your life?/'Cause I can see it ruining mine."

"I had just started to date my former partner and I was freaking out," Diaz explains. "You can't control anything. All I can do is just simply keep walking forward. It's become my own mantra."

She extends this concept to "Everything Almost," another highlight, about giving nearly all of yourself in a relationship — while keeping a small portion just for you. Hearing it, you can tell why Diaz calls the track a "straight-up journal entry." With dense details packed into sharp lines, it's a future fan favorite they'll eventually know every word to: "I had a dream there was a baby inside of me/One hand on my belly and the other one pointing/Ordering you around the house like a bitch/And you just laughing and taking it."

"Madi has a really pleasing way of keeping everything conversational," her friend Kacey Musgraves tells Rolling Stone. "My favorite kind of songwriting." The Nashville musicians have known each other for a long time, but became close in the pandemic — cooking, shopping for antiques, and joking about sharing a house together. "Madi and I will hit the occasional estate sale or go for a long walk and chat," Musgraves says. "There's also wine. And horses. We're both horse girls through and through."

Musgraves appears on the *Weird Faith* duet "Don't Do Me Good," a dazzling send-off to a lover with a potent chorus about finally throwing in the towel. "There's something about her voice that just lifts the whole thing," Diaz says. "I know Kacey's speaking voice pretty exclusively, so it was fun to be in the studio and put the headphones on and then listen to that voice coming out of her mouth: 'Oh, right! That's my friend!'"

Co-written with Ed Sheeran collaborator Amy Wadge, "Don't Do Me Good" is easily one of the strongest songs in Diaz's catalog. But she was hesitant to ask Musgraves to sing on it. "I was totally terrified to ask her, because that bridge feels comfortable for me and my friendship with, like, Courtney Marie Andrews," Diaz says, naming an Americana peer. "But Kacey is in a completely different stratosphere. She's a pop star." (Hearing this quote, Musgraves laughs: "That's ridiculous. We're friends. I was like, 'Absolutely. Duh. Yes.'")

Many of Diaz's friends these days are female musicians — something that wasn't always the case for her. "With our generation, alpha females were taught to avoid each other in our twenties," Diaz says. "Which is such a goddamn shame. It's funny how that completely shifted in my thirties."

Diaz grew up in Norwalk, Connecticut, and moved to Pennsylvania when she was seven; later, she studied at Berklee College of Music before dropping out to play gigs at the Bitter End in New York. She moved to Nashville in 2008, grinding it out as a songwriter, then moved to Los Angeles to play in bands, finally returning to Nashville in 2017.

"I did not literally think for two seconds about being a woman in the industry and how that would maybe, eventually, become difficult," she says, thinking back to her early career. "It's fucking different for women, and hopefully people will respect that at some point. I honestly don't think that men do."

Diaz names several musicians who tour with their children, from Maren Morris to Elle King to Margo Price ("a fucking badass"). But despite that line about parenthood in "Everything Almost," she knows it's not her time yet. She's learning to live in the present, citing Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl's 1946 memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning*, as a recent inspiration.

"It's about listening to what life is asking of you and responding to those questions," she says. "And, like, life isn't asking me to be a mother. Right now, it's asking me to fucking carry my guitar two miles from LaGuardia Airport, and have a rat's nest of cables in my carry-on bag that weighs 50 pounds. So I'm trying to be there." ANGIE MARTOCCIO

FAST FACTS

WRITING RETREAT
Diaz estimates that she wrote "well over 150" songs when she was stuck at home at the height of the pandemic.

SONGBIRD
Diaz can be heard singing background vocals on Miranda Lambert's 2016 album, *The Weight of These Wings*.

FATHER OF INVENTION
Music runs in the family: Diaz's dad plays in a Frank Zappa tribute band.

BACK IN TIME
She's been getting back into *Mad Men* ("a really solid rewatch").

HAIR BY DANIEL LUTZ USING R+CO PRODUCTS. MAKEUP BY ABBY BERNI USING DIOR BEAUTY AND HOURGLASS COSMETICS. PREVIOUS PAGE: DRESS BY STAUD. THIS PAGE: TOP IS DIAZ'S OWN. JEANS BY LEVI'S. BOOTS VINTAGE. PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANCE BY ELVIS TOWERS.

Irfana Opens Up About the Inspiration Behind 'London Dry' and Future Collaborations

The track has been produced by Mumbai-based artist Zero Chill

WHEN WE LAST spoke to Kodaikanal-bred rapper Irfana this past June, she'd just released her scorching track "Sheila Silk." Since then, the artist tells us that she's been experimenting with new songs, working on demos and performing live. To kick off 2024, Irfana has released her latest offering, the bopping "London Dry," produced by Mumbai artist Zero Chill and out via Def Jam India.

In this interview with *Rolling Stone India*, Irfana talks to us about "London Dry," her plans for 2024 and more. Read below.

What can you tell us about your new song "London Dry?"

I wrote 'London Dry' in Himachal during the floods. I was living in Goa at the moment and the idea sparked right before the trip when I came home after a long night of partying and saw this bottle of London dry gin in my room. I was just about ready to escape the noise and go someplace quiet so I could think and write, and what better way to get out of a situation than to write about it. The original song was a lot more sensitive and sweet which I performed once or twice as a spoken word, then I found this beat and the second verse just erupted out of me and I changed the whole song. It went from sad to bad.

I figured people would relate if they really listened to the lyrics. It's more than just a song about partying, it's an observation of my specific human experience as an artist and a woman in the industry and what comes with being all that. I'm really starting to love my sound, the baritone and clarity that I thought wasn't nice before is starting to grow on me and I'm learning how to capitalize on that.

What are your plans for 2024?

I'm going to drop more songs independently this year and more frequently. I also have a line of features with some artists I really dig like Flyyboy, Sampriti, Shia and Suvi. I'd honestly like to work with some more desi rappers, I want to see how far we can push each other lyrically because I know some of these boys are regularly slaying the beat and I want to be a part of something huge and everlasting. Speaking of which, watch out for our song 'INDOVISION' out on January 26th, I have a one-minute verse beside some deadly male rappers and it's my favorite verse so far! I will also be writing a little more in Tamil which I have discovered is too much fun.

What would you like to share with your listeners?

Yes, support your English artists in India! We're here to pioneer new fields and the more you listen and support, the more we can grow as a whole. Art has never seen boundaries and for a global fusion to be allowed to happen — will only evolve the craft, the crafter and the society that incubates both. DAVID BRITTO

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Sheherazaad Marks the Beginning of an Epic Tale with 'Qasr' Mini-Album

The San Francisco-raised, Indian-origin artist has five tracks produced by Grammy-winning artist Arooj Aftab, with the album releasing on March 1st via London's Erased Tapes label

There's an air of enchantment as Indo-American artist Sheherazaad beckons on her new song "Dhund Lo Mujhe," the second single off her just-announced mini-album *Qasr*. The five-track album, produced by Pakistani artist Arooj Aftab, arrives on March 1st via U.K. independent label Erased Tapes.

Suitably atmospheric and featuring strings and percussion by Runar Blesvik and Egyptian violinist Basma Edrees, "Dhund Lo Mujhe" is the follow-up to the Brooklyn/India-based artist's debut on Erased Tapes with "Mashoor" in October last year. In 2020, Sheherazaad released her previous project Khwaabistan which was what caught Aftab – a Grammy winner for her song "Mohabbat" in 2022 and Grammy nominee for "Udhero Na" in 2023, plus the collaborative *Love In Exile* this year.

Without a doubt, both "Mashoor" and "Dhund Lo Mujhe" bear the atmospheric, hypnotic quality that Aftab has brought to her own music, but Sheherazaad heightens it with her honed ambient and folk-pop informed vocal treatment in Hindi and Urdu. The artist says it was Aftab who had recommended approaching Erased Tapes, which has previously released work by composers such as Nils Frahm and Olafur Arnalds. Describing the shift from working in "unglamorous isolation" as an independent artist, Sheherazaad says, "The label world was foreign to me, where I couldn't imagine major industrial support for experimentalism and genre-defiance. So I was floored to discover how obviously Erased Tapes prized these qualities which I also cherished, and how they are ushering in a new era of music innovation."

While these songs and *Qasr* may be the first time a wider audience is hearing Sheherazaad – especially because she's now got an acclaimed label's backing – the artist does acknowledge her efforts with *Khwaabistan*. "I had to make *Khwaabistan* in order to make *Qasr* – it's kind of like shedding of the skin," she says. There's a palpable excitement with launching *Qasr* in March, with Sheherazaad terming it as "the beginning of an epic tale" that also subverts expectations and is an embodiment of her deep lineage, growing up in an Indian music-inclined household but also trained in jazz vocals and later, Hindustani classical (by her guru Madhuvanti Bhide).

Sheherazaad introduced *Qasr* with the kind of tension and drama interplay that one hears in "Mashoor," which came with a hair-raising music video directed by filmmaker Julia Zanin De Paula. There's a faceless, black figure throughout and understandably, the artist would rather hear our interpretations of the narrative rather than dive into anything concrete.

The song also features classical guitar from Indian-origin Ria Modak and percussion from Lebanon-origin artist Gilbert Mansour. Sheherazaad again credits Aftab for introducing her to Modak.

"Throughout the process of working with Arooj, I felt so seen and held, knowing that all the iterations would pass through her shared cultural understanding and raw brilliance. To have such a radical, gender-expansive presence like hers guiding the project basically just aligned the project to itself, to its own innate backbone and messaging."

To those familiar with Hindi and Urdu, there's a certain accessibility yet depth in the way Sheherazaad has written and delivered the lyrics to songs like "Mashoor" and "Dhund Lo Mujhe." She talks about how she often has "diasporic people in mind while composing," specifically their idea of a mother tongue or language. While there has often been ridicule, gate-keeping and shame attached to "broken accents," Sheherazaad says she finds "purity and story in this broken way of speaking." She adds, "The blasphemy of it is so musical to me, so ultra-contemporary and yet very folk."

She describes feelings of responsibility and pride if she had to bring her music to India, but does add that she would also feel "fairly shy and dazzled" by the prospect of performing here. Sheherazaad – true to her *One Thousand and One Nights*-inspired name that plays on "free" and "city" – suggests that her music is nomadic in nature and would never have a single "home." She adds, "Maybe the music will resist the so-called motherland and vice-versa. Or it'll be a glorious homecoming. Still, to venture back to the subcontinent to perform Qasr would certainly feel like an exquisite expression of nature's many cycles."

ANURAG TAGAT

ZAYIRA RAY

Faridkot, Ricky Kej, Warsi Brothers and More Join EQUALS Series

The folk-meets-indie-music collaborative series' new outing also includes artists like The Yellow Diary, Sucharita Gupta, Aswekeepsearching, Des Raj Lachkani and Swarathma, among others

"Our biggest aim from a collaboration is to explore something new sonic ideas and also experience another artist's expression of the same emotion," says The Yellow Diary

THE SECOND season of collaborative music series EQUALS by music non-profit Anahad Foundation premiered on January 25th on JioCinema, with seven episodes that feature folk artists and Indian indie favorites together.

The follow-up to the first season from 2019, EQUALS will include artists like Ricky Kej, The Yellow Diary, Faridkot, Swarathma, Shadow and Light, aswekeepsearching and Rasika Shekar collaborating with folk heroes including Warsi Brothers, Prahlad Tipaniya, Des Raj Lachkani, Sucharita Gupta, Dulal Manki, Rina Das and Jumma Jogi. All episodes will be out on January 25th via JioCinema, followed by the videos going up on Anahad Foundation's YouTube page.

While the first season spawned hits like "Nasha" by Faridkot and Amar Jalal Group and "Karam" by When Chai Met Toast and Rangle Sardar, this new season has different things in store. The Warsi Brothers tell *Rolling Stone India* about being part of the series in a statement, "We were very happy. Ricky Kej, us and the whole team have done incredible work together. This collaboration has been amazing." The pair worked with Kej on the song "Kaunsa Ghar."

Elsewhere, The Yellow Diary say in a joint statement that working with vocalist Sucharita Gupta on "Raasta Sapnon Ka" was "mentally nourishing" for them. The collaboration spanned just about three days, with the band meeting Gupta, working on the song and then filming the music video. "Our biggest aim from a collaboration is to explore something new. Explore new sonic ideas and also experience another artist's expression of the same emotion. Also, as a result, both artists will have the opportunity to have each other's audiences listen to their music, which means more people will hear the music," the band says.

Singer-composer Rina Das' "Shakti" with post-rock band aswekeepsearching explores gender bias. The act's bassist Robert Alex says they could have just been drawn by the success of EQUALS in the past to hop on the project, but were more focused on "the experience of going out into a world you don't know with the aim to create something." He adds, "Rina ji is an abundant resource of knowledge, not only for musical understanding but also for the stories she has to share with the world, we thoroughly enjoyed every moment of creating music with her and all the wonderful Baul musicians who accompanied her."

Flautist, singer and composer Rasika Shekar, who has collaborated with veteran vocalist Prahlad Tipaniya on "Muniya," calls being part of EQUALS as a "special opportunity" to work with folk music. She adds, "The sensitivity it required to approach the form through collaboration was exciting to me. I remember post the shoot of the song, I rushed out because I had tears of deep joy. I experienced an overwhelming moment of the purest form of love and honest music in that room with all the artists."

Bengaluru's Swarathma are no strangers to folk-fusion collaborations, most recently performing with collectives like Rhythms of the Earth. For EQUALS, they pair up with the group Jumma Jogi on a socio-politically-conscious song called "Haalaat Gazab." Swarathma's Vasu Dixit and Jumma Jogi's Jumma Khan lead the charge on the song. The artists spent about four days together to make the song, performing the song together at the Global Music Institute campus in Noida. The band says jointly, "Such collaborations feel as if a window has been opened in our minds about the kind of music that lives outside our world. It is a way of learning about different musical styles and embracing them to the best of our ability – and in the process make a song that we all love. All of this has already happened. Any joy it brings to audiences, or resonance it has with listeners, or success the series has... is a bonus!" **ANURAG TAGAT**

COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

LEGEND

Bringing Bob Marley to Life

The director, stars, and Marley family discuss the making of the new biopic 'One Love'

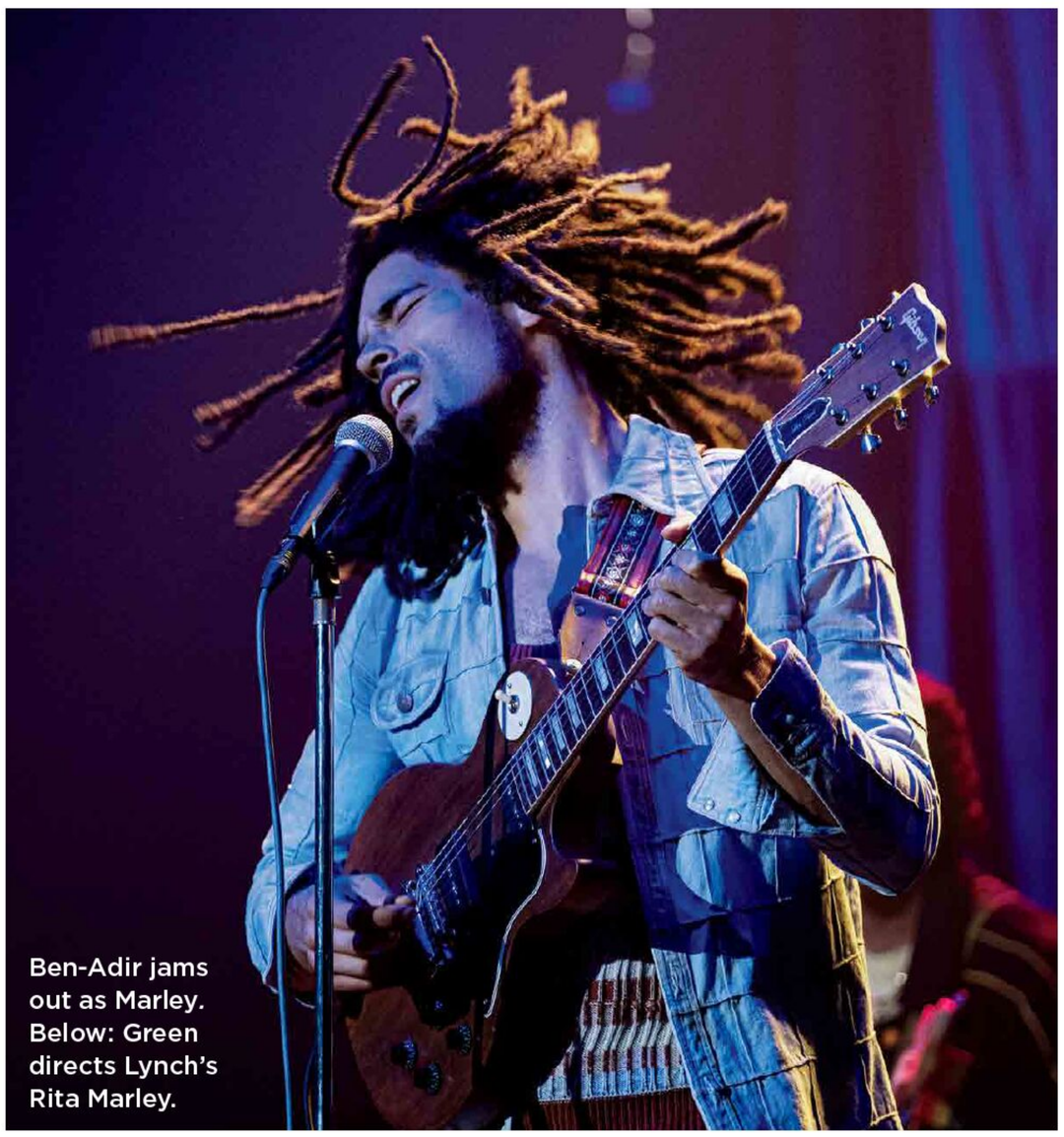
By DAVID BROWNE

Filming a scene as the title mystic in *Bob Marley: One Love,* Kingsley Ben-Adir was striding across a room in Jamaica when he heard, "Cut!" Marley's son Ziggy, who was on set, had some input: He told the actor that his father wouldn't have walked that particular way. "He was going up the stairs," Marley says, "and I tell him, 'Listen! When Bob walks, he takes *two* steps at a time.'"

Months later, in New York, Ben-Adir re-creates the revised move, his knees almost coming up to his chin. "Everyone was doing an example of how Bob would do it," he says. "I had to stay open to that and be like, 'This stuff is helping me. It's helping me find him.' I had to stay fluid with that."

Since Bob Marley's death 43 years ago, his family has turned his legend into a highly monetized estate, selling everything from weed to headphones. The only thing missing was a biopic — which, according to Ziggy, had been broached in the past, but perhaps too soon for him and his family. "As human beings in our maturity," he says, "I don't think we were at the level yet to take this on." But starting in 2018, the family decided to take the reins. "They were bringing something to us, and in this case, we brought something to the studio," he says. "That is the big difference."

In theaters Feb. 14, *Bob Marley: One Love* is an unconventional biopic in ways that might startle or please his fans. Start with its focusing on a specific period in Marley's life: from the attempt to end it in 1976 through his two-year exile in London, the making of his *Exodus* album, and his return to Jamaica in 1978 for a concert that helped ease political tensions in his home country. "I don't think anybody was interested in doing a cradle-to-grave story," says director Reinaldo Marcus Green (*Monsters and Men, King Richard*). "We felt like that window of time encapsulated a lot of Bob's life. There was a lot going on: political turmoil in Jamaica, a war, the assassination attempt. Bob was at the center of it. He wasn't a global superstar, but *Exodus* put him on the map. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."



Ben-Adir jams out as Marley. Below: Green directs Lynch's Rita Marley.

"Political turmoil in Jamaica, a war, an assassination attempt," the director says. "Bob was at the center of it."

When he was first approached about the role, Ben-Adir, who is British, admits he thought he was the wrong man for the task. "I was thinking practically," says Ben-Adir, who is 6' 2". "He's 5' 7". I'm a baritone and can't sing, and I don't play the guitar. Having one white parent and one Black parent is what we have in common." But after he learned that Green would be directing and that Marley's family was aboard, Ben-Adir signed on — then underwent months of training to transform himself into Marley as much as possible.

With the help of never-before-seen interview footage supplied by the family, the actor studied and transcribed Marley's particular patois to avoid making any obvious mistakes. "I'll convince everyone in the States that it's OK, but Jamaicans will know," he says. "They will know every single fucking word." During the music performances, we're mostly hearing Marley's voice, but Ben-Adir took vocal and guitar lessons so he could still sing along, even if we're ultimately only hearing his own singing voice in a few scenes, like a re-creation of the jam session that led to "Exodus." "You do not want my concert singing in this film," Ben-Adir admits. "I mean, I butchered a lot of people's ears for hours and hours." Green even called Rami Malek to ask how he inhabited Freddie Mercury in *Bohemian Rhapsody* in a similar way. "He said, 'I belted out everything in that movie, and he should go for it — he should do everything, and you'll find the right balance,'" Green recalls.

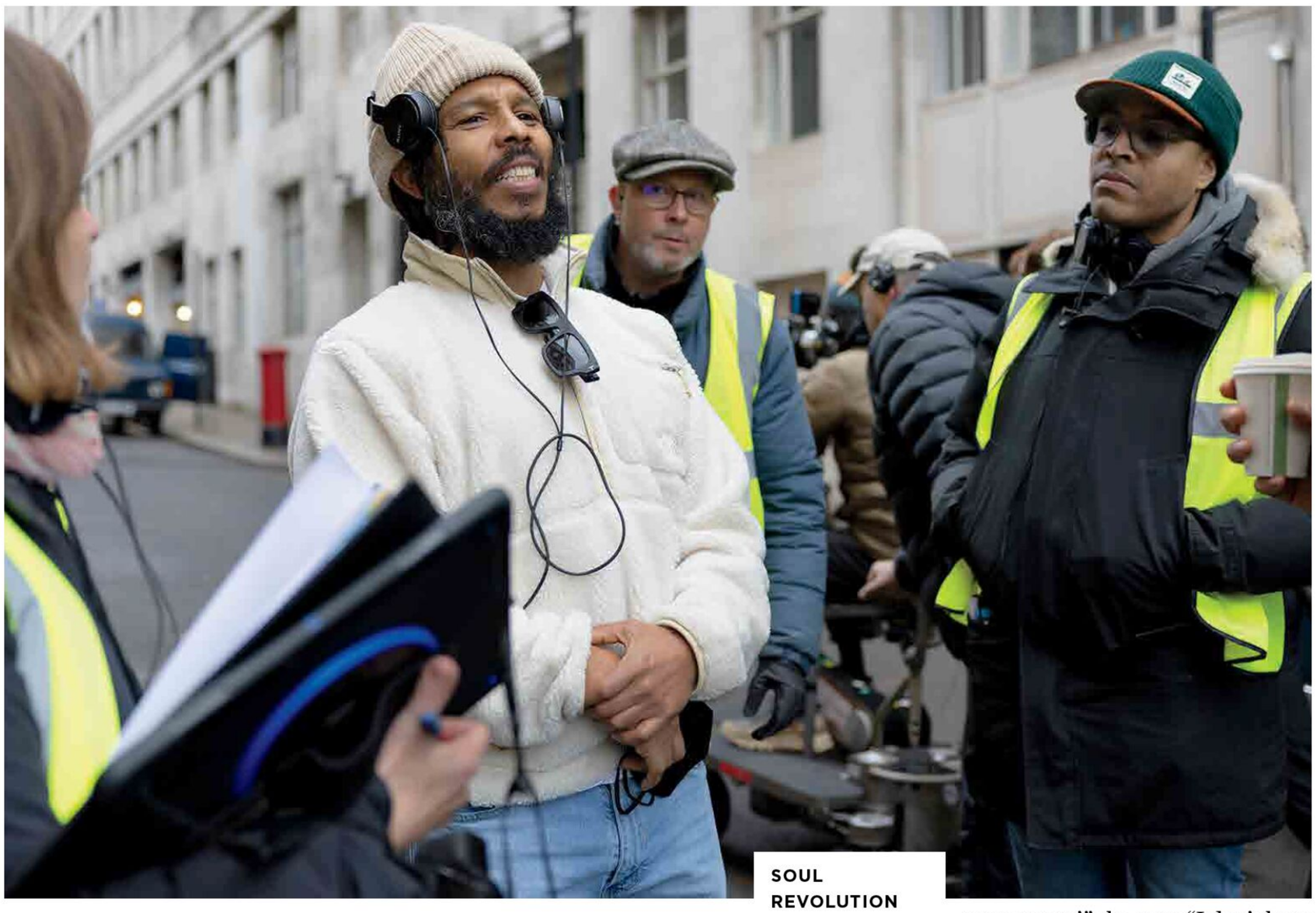
Ziggy Marley says he was ultimately satisfied with Ben-Adir's work re-creating his father. "He captured a deepness that is really human and is really touching," he says. "He touches on funny things, too. He did that very well. Not in a mimicking way, not in a cheesy way. There are some scenes that might be closer than others, but overall, he did it artfully. He's interpreting Bob, not being Bob. Nobody can ever be Bob. This is an artist representing this painting."

The soundtrack involved sonic tweaking of its own. The movie re-creates two pivotal concerts during those years — 1976's Smile Jamaica show and 1978's One Love Peace Concert. In what may be a controversial move, Marley's son Stephen, who served as the film's music supervisor, hired newer Jamaican musicians to rerecord the backing tracks on songs from the two shows. (One of those musicians is Aston Barrett Jr., son of the original Wailers bass player and leader of the current version of the Wailers.) "It's a long time [ago]," Stephen says of the concert tapes. "So you have to go in and touch up some of the music to make it sound good in the theater."

With Ziggy serving as its most hands-on producer in Jamaica and London, *One Love* involved a greater level of scrutiny than most biopics. Neville Garrick, the Tuff Gong art director and Marley confidant who died this past November, was also an adviser. "We bring the culture and authenticity to it," says Ziggy. "We lived it."

As Ben-Adir learned during his walking scene, cast members were regularly corrected on the types of clothing or hats they would wear. "There were small things like, 'She wouldn't wear a shirt like that, or 'Where's the bangle she always wears?'" says Lashana Lynch, cast as Rita Marley, Bob's wife and protector. "The bangle was really dear to her, and I realized I hadn't had it on in one of the scenes and thought, 'Gosh, we have to make sure we have this in every scene.' Every day was something new."

FROM TOP: CHIABELLA JAMES/PARAMOUNT PICTURES, 2; GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



SOUL REVOLUTION Producer Ziggy Marley, Bob's real-life son, looks on during the filming of *Bob Marley: One Love.*

REBEL MUSIC Ben-Adir's Marley with (from left) Aston Barrett Jr., Sheldon Shepherd, and James Norton

During a scene in which Bob is seen disembarking a plane and stepping into a limo, Green was told they had it wrong. "It was, 'No, Bob would never sit in the back seat and be driven by somebody,'" says the director. "His brethren are his equal. If there's a seat in front, he's going to sit next to him." In her own headset during filming, Sevana, the Jamaican singer and actress cast as I Threes member Judy Mowatt, would be told when she wasn't sounding enough like Mowatt. Lynch says they all rolled with it. "I personally invited the guidance because I just thought, 'If this was my parents and two strangers came in trying to emulate them, I would want to police everything to protect my parents,'" she says. "I don't have a legendary family. They do."

To make himself more closely resemble the shorter, more sinewy Marley, Ben-Adir had some mild prosthetics added to his nose. According to Ziggy, his mother signed off on the project, although she did occasionally point out something she felt wasn't quite right. "She might say, 'Oh, he doesn't look like Bob,'" Ziggy says, with a laugh. "She was complaining like that, about his look in one shot. She knows Bob, you know. But she trusts me, too."

Lynch had her own concerns going into the project. "With her being a wife and a mother, there's danger of Mrs. Marley being reduced to just those two roles in her life," says Lynch, who is British and of Jamaican descent. "And she was so much more and represents so much, and so much to Bob. I was just determined to have her be what she needed to in the film."

That sense of protectiveness emerged during one of the movie's most dramatic and pivotal scenes: an argument between Marley and Rita in which the latter expresses her frustration over her husband's fame going to his dreadlocked head. "It was months and months and months in the making," says Ben-Adir of that scene, which only lasts a few minutes. "That scene got redrafted and redrafted," he explains. "That was a deep discussion between Lashana and me and Ziggy and the family. There are lines in that scene that are so deeply personal to the family. It was a decision for them to make, how much they wanted to share." Green adds: "I would be very protective if I was making a movie about my father too. But Ziggy's protection was to tell the truth. Rita *would* get angry and she *would* slap Bob. For us to see that is great. Ziggy wasn't saying, 'Let's pretend that didn't happen.'"

Of that and the rest of the movie, Ziggy Marley says he is ultimately at peace: "You have to tell the truth in this truncated time period. It's the life truth, and we're telling it." The lessons learned were evident months later, when cast and crew reassembled in London for a reshoot and Marley watched as Ben-Adir emerged from a subway stop. "He remembered, one year later, to take two steps," Marley says approvingly. "Which, you know, is good."

Burnin' and Licensin': Marley Inc.

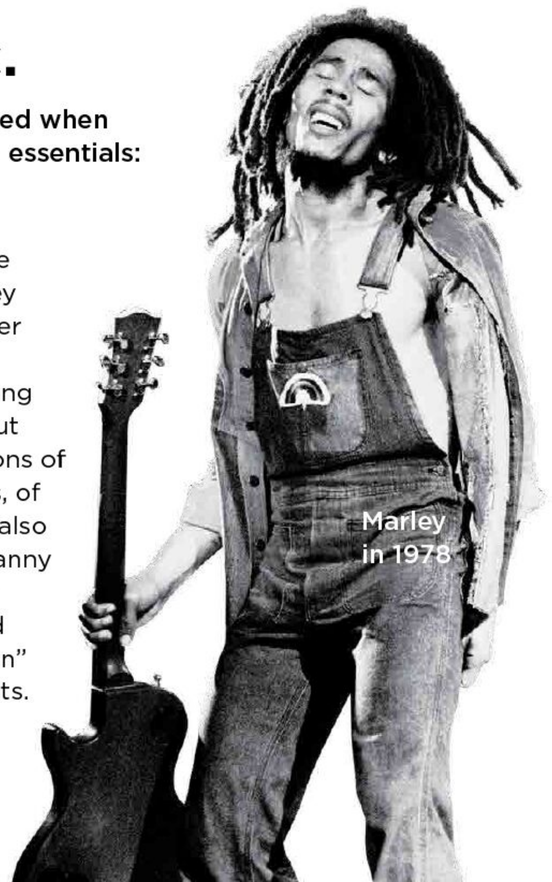
By the mid-2000s, the business of Bob was stagnant, but that changed when his kids began attaching his name and likeness to products. Here, the essentials:

Food
It started with Marley Coffee, then spread to cook-at-home Marley Kitchen. Now, there's Bob Marley — One Love restaurant at Jamaica's Sangster Airport, and Marley Beverage sells teas, ice coffees, and sodas.

Weed
Marley Natural, founded in 2014, sells everything from water pipes to grinders. The Marley Museum has a dispensary, and in Michigan, you can buy Lion Order, official Marley weed. Did we mention the Marley One shrooms?

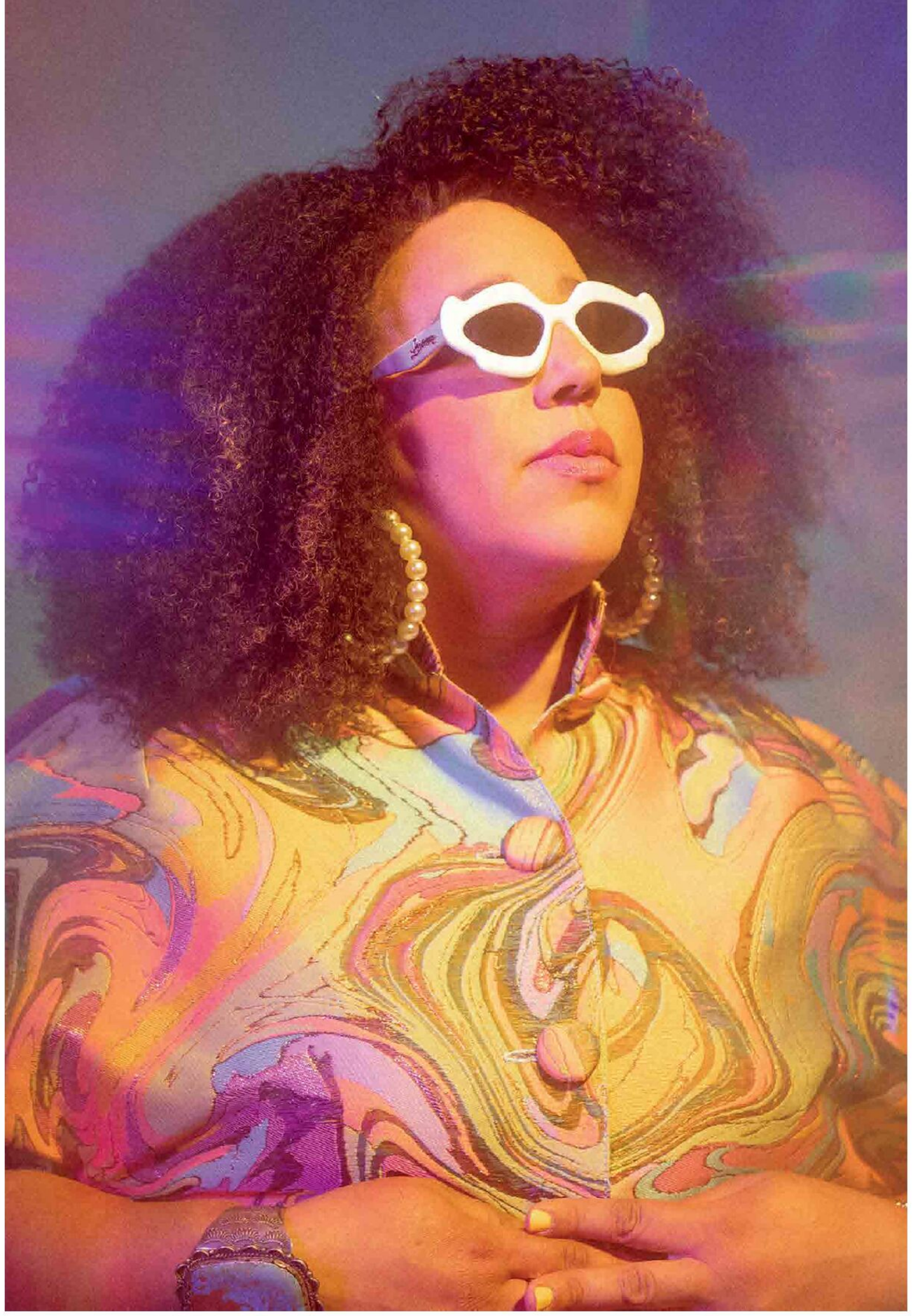
Tech
Naturally, you'll need official House of Marley products to listen to his music. Choices include bookshelf and Bluetooth speakers, turntables, wireless earbuds, and charging cables, most made with recycled products.

Clothing
An extensive line of Marley merch — over 120 items — has something for just about everyone: tons of Bob T-shirts, of course, but also tote bags, fanny packs, baby onesies, and "Redemption" jogging pants.



Marley in 1978

CHIABELLA JAMES/PARAMOUNT PICTURES, 2



Q & A

Brittany Howard

On how the pandemic era made her 'get a life,' her new outlook on creativity, and her secret love of metal

By BRITTANY SPANOS

"The route I'm taking to being a farmer is ridiculous," Brittany Howard says, sitting at the William Vale luxury hotel during her press trip to New York. She's fantasizing about a potential future, one where she would maybe own a farm like the one she grew up on. It's one of many ways she can see herself adding to the list of non-musical hobbies in her repertoire since 2020: fixing boats, fishing. But don't worry, music is still at the front of the former Alabama Shakes leader's mind at 35. She has a new solo album, *What Now,* due out Feb. 2. She started working on it in 2020 while isolating in a rental home in Nashville. It's a testament to newfound patience that translates into some of her most grounded and reflective music yet.

You wrote this album during a time when you were still waiting to tour your 2019 solo debut more widely. What was that like?

Honestly, I kind of put that to the side. I just wanted to stay alive. So much was going on in the world … Black Lives Matter, a tornado where I lived in Nashville, helping people pick the pieces back up. Everybody was worried about their job security. I was sad about that, but as time went on, I was like, "Oh, this is actually pretty nice to not be on the road." … I was like, "What do I want my life to look like?" It was like a tiny midlife crisis. In those three years, I grew up a lot.

Did that time make you rethink how you approached music?

I was renting a house, [so] I didn't have a studio. There was a tiny little-kid's room in the house and just a laptop. Very basic. I said, "I'm gonna go in here and record something I'm feeling every day. Just sit down and do it." I told myself it doesn't have to be good. That was new. I used to really torture myself.

How do you mean?

When [Alabama Shakes] did *Sound & Color,* I locked myself in the basement, and there was a bat in there. Super stressed, only working at night, sleeping all day, pounding coffee at, like, 2 a.m., 3 a.m., 4 a.m. I was like, "This is how you make good work."

What was that about? Were you superstitious?

I guess I thought that the looser I got mentally — the crazier I was — the less I would judge the work. Then I found out you could just *not* judge your work.

How was that mentality affecting your life outside of work?

There was almost no life outside of work. That was a problem.

Are you still seeking that balance?

I figured out the balance, for sure. This is a hard business. When you're a creative person, so much of your identity is wrapped up into what you're creating. There's no boundaries for that. You're like, "This is all of me." And that's all fine and good, but what if there's more to life? That was something I was visiting because it was taken away from all of us. It was scary. I had to get a life.

What does that life look like for you?

I'm slowing down and appreciating the people I have around me more. Nature, just small things. Even the sun coming through the window is something that can make me really happy. I used to think it was success and awards and money — all these things that we think will make us happy. But in those few years, I was just like, "Man, I'm grateful that the oxygen I breathe is clean. I'm glad I can breathe." There's no prize at the end for working yourself to death.

You've said that the through line of this album is heartbreak and analyzing your own romantic patterns. Can you say more about the patterns you were analyzing?

How do I say something without saying too much? [*Laughs.*] I think there was a pattern of withdrawal on my end. Because of the way I grew up mostly an only child, I got used to my company. Anybody in my space would feel like too much. Ultimately, that's not fun. It was something I analyzed, and I'd say fixed.

Have romantic relationships become easier since you figured that out?

I think that remains to be seen. I feel like I'm spending more time with myself, getting less enmeshed in a relationship — which I feel like a lot of us fall into. It's only natural that love feels good.

What about your friendships?

I definitely don't take things personally [anymore], and I ask my friends what they need from me — whereas before, I would just be trying to do what I would want. I guess I'm paying more attention.

You've been in a couple of bands, and now you have a couple of solo albums. What else are you interested in exploring in the future?

I just follow my creativity. It's really that simple. If I get bored doing the solo stuff on my own, I'll just do something else. But I'd like to get into metal next, probably. I've liked that since high school, but because the Shakes took off I never had a chance to get in there and do that.

What are some of the metal bands you like?

I liked American Nightmare, Lamb of God, Slipknot, Blood Brothers. People are gonna come for me in the comments: "That's not metal! Those are screamo artists, that's hardcore!" I just like loud rock music. ®

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TO CAPTURE A FIRE

Actor Kingsley Ben-Adir on playing Jamaica's most famous son, reggae icon Bob Marley — a role he embodies with the full support of the Marley family — in forthcoming biopic, *One Love*

By Nick Reilly

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY KASIRYE
CREATIVE DIRECTION BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN
STYLING BY ITUNU OKE

KINGSLEY WEARS BLAZER, TOP AND TROUSERS BY **AMI PARIS**, OVERCOAT BY **FLORENCE BLACK**

KINGSLEY WEARS JACKET, SHIRT AND TIE BY **GANT**, JEANS BY **PAUL SMITH**, WATCH BY **OMEGA**

KINGSLEY BEN-ADIR

WHEN KINGSLEY BEN-ADIR was first approached to play Bob Marley by the late music icon's son Ziggy, no less, the daunting prospect of immortalising the eternal reggae icon meant that he almost turned down the role completely. "It initially felt like a no from me," he recalls. "I really felt like I wasn't right for it. I don't sing, I don't dance, and there was nothing physically similar that meant I could really convince people I was him."

After spending a weekend delving into the singer's life, a "transcendental" experience occurred when the British actor found himself watching Marley's legendary 1977 live shows at London's Rainbow Theatre. This allowed him to forge a greater connection with the man who brought reggae to the world and, ultimately, to deliver an audition that won over Marley's family. "When Bob Marley's family are looking at you and saying they want you to play him, as an artist it feels dangerous to say no," says the 37-year-old.

Ben-Adir is speaking to Rolling Stone UK in a London hotel in December 2023, two months before the film is about to hit cinemas. He's calm and friendly, but the occasional grin that flashes across his face while talking about playing Marley suggests he's only too aware that this is his biggest role to date, a chance to play a musical great and have that portrayal watched by Marley's legions of fans across the globe.

Born in north London, Ben-Adir has become an increasingly ubiquitous face on the big screen in recent years. He first found fame playing a series of small-screen roles on cosy UK crime dramas such as *Vera* and *Midsomer Murders*, but in recent years Hollywood has increasingly come calling. He won plaudits for his turn as Malcolm X in Regina King's *One Night In Miami*, has become part of the MCU with a leading part in *Secret Invasion* on Disney+, and even portrayed Basketball Ken in *Barbie*, the biggest film of last year. But it's in *One Love*, produced by Ziggy alongside his wife Orly, that Ben-Adir will step firmly into the spotlight. His portrayal of the reggae icon has already won the approval of the wider Marley family, including the late singer's wife Rita, and Cedella, one of Marley's daughters.

Part of the Marleys' endorsement, Ben-Adir says, was an early realisation that a copycat portrayal was not the point of the project. "As we went along, we understood that this wasn't and should never be an imitation of Bob or an attempt to mimic him. It was a communal effort to get underneath the man and show a side to him that's more human, to look at some of the struggles and some of the pressures he was under at the time. And I was like, 'Well, I'm an actor and I can do that.'"

Before *One Love* director Reinaldo Marcus Green (*King Richard*) watched Ben-Adir's audition, the search for someone to play the titular music icon had been prolonged, and the project was in danger of falling into development hell. "It was a long search, and I hadn't given up, but I thought it was very possible that we weren't going to find the right actor, and the movie wasn't going to happen. We'd looked through thousands of tapes, and there were some good actors who just weren't right," he reflects.

"But when I saw Kingsley's tape, it was the first time that a light bulb had gone off for me. It felt different. If you've met Kingsley, you'll know he's got an incredible presence, and he's a deeply intelligent and sensitive man. After I watched that tape, my tentacles were going off, and I just thought, 'This guy is special.' So, obviously, I spoke to Ziggy and told him how significant I thought the tape was. Because I wasn't looking for a musician, I didn't care if he could sing or dance or any of that stuff. I just cared if he could act and, man, I saw that in him."

It was crucial that the Marley family felt the same about Ben-Adir. Ziggy Marley admits that it was a surprise to be considering a British actor for the role. "We were looking for somebody from Jamaica or somebody who had the dialect straight away, but when we saw his audition, he immediately kept our attention. As a family we never felt like he was trying to mimic Bob, and there was a magnetism missing before Kingsley came. We needed somebody who had it like Bob had it, and this is how I felt about Kingsley. He just kept our attention the whole time and just did a really great job.

"We've been showing friends, and nobody is questioning his interpretation. There's no question that this man has done the thing that we asked him to do."

Early footage of the film viewed by Rolling Stone UK proves that Ben-Adir is a remarkable fit as Marley. He manages to nail the singer's irrepressible spirit and spring-like sprightliness while performing on stage.

An hour spent in Ben-Adir's company is enough to leave you wondering if the actor's spirit played a large part in his selection, too. His answers are punctuated with deep, thoughtful pauses, allowing him to answer with remarkable clarity and insight. Interview clips of the late Marley show that he possessed the same qualities.

But when Ben-Adir's casting was announced in January 2022, it caused a stir back in Marley's native Jamaica, with some refusing to accept that the country's most famous export would be played by a British

"I really felt like I wasn't right for it. I don't sing, I don't dance, and there was nothing physically similar that meant I could really convince people I was him"

KINGSLEY BEN-ADIR

ONE VOICE Ben-Adir's vocals have been blended with Marley's

actor. "You searched for a year and couldn't come up with a Jamaican?" wrote one critic on social media. "It won't be the same as using a Jamaican or one of his kids. We need that raw Jamaican patois in order to feel the vibration."

Responding to the criticism today, Ben-Adir says that he's letting his performance do the talking, while explaining that the approval of Marley's family should be the final word on the matter. "Without the support of Bob's family, I wouldn't have gone near it," he says. "It's not my job to explain why I was cast, but in my mind all I know is that Rei [director] and [Marley's] family made their decision, and I felt love, and I felt trust and that allowed me to think, 'Right, I'm going to go fully 100 per cent on this.'

"I mean, I sat with the head of Paramount early on, and I said to him: 'When you say go, I'm going to go, just so you know. When I go, there will be emails, and there will be ideas, and I'm going to be non-stop in my research.' They were suddenly like 'All right, this guy is crazy enough to do it.'"

When Ben-Adir went to Marley's homeland for filming, it left him in no doubt as to the magnitude of his task. "When I went to Jamaica, I saw pictures of Bob on every road. There were statues of him everywhere, and the significance of this man to that culture is just unlike anything you've ever seen," he thoughtfully explains. "So that meant there was a huge feeling of respect and pressure, and I knew I couldn't do it unless we represented the language and culture to the fullest."

True to his word, Ben-Adir set about immersing himself in the role, even down to perfecting the language of Jamaica. "Patois is not a dialect," he says. "It's a different language entirely, and it was about making sure that everyone understood that. This is a foreign language film with no subtitles, so this challenge proved massively important. We needed to stay true to Bob and the culture because that language is the emotional through-line of the story for a universal audience."

To learn Patois, Ben-Adir recalls trawling through a treasure trove of rare archival interviews he was given by Marley's daughter Cedella. He would painstakingly transcribe each one, before seeking dialect advice from local Jamaicans while filming in the singer's native country, as well as from the local musicians who play The Wailers in the film. "I'd been prepping on my own for seven or eight months, but suddenly the descendants of The Wailers were playing! Suddenly, there was this community, and they were so supportive of me and there to help. There were always people to bounce off. Neville Garrick, Bob's best mate who died recently, he'd be there, and he'd just say 'Nah, Bob would do this like that!' I was grateful there was a real understanding that I wasn't just trying to do an impersonation. There were flashes of Bob's spirit, but it's Bob through me. This is my interpretation of who he was."

"When I went to Jamaica, I saw pictures of Bob on every road. The significance of that man to that culture is just unlike anything you've ever seen"

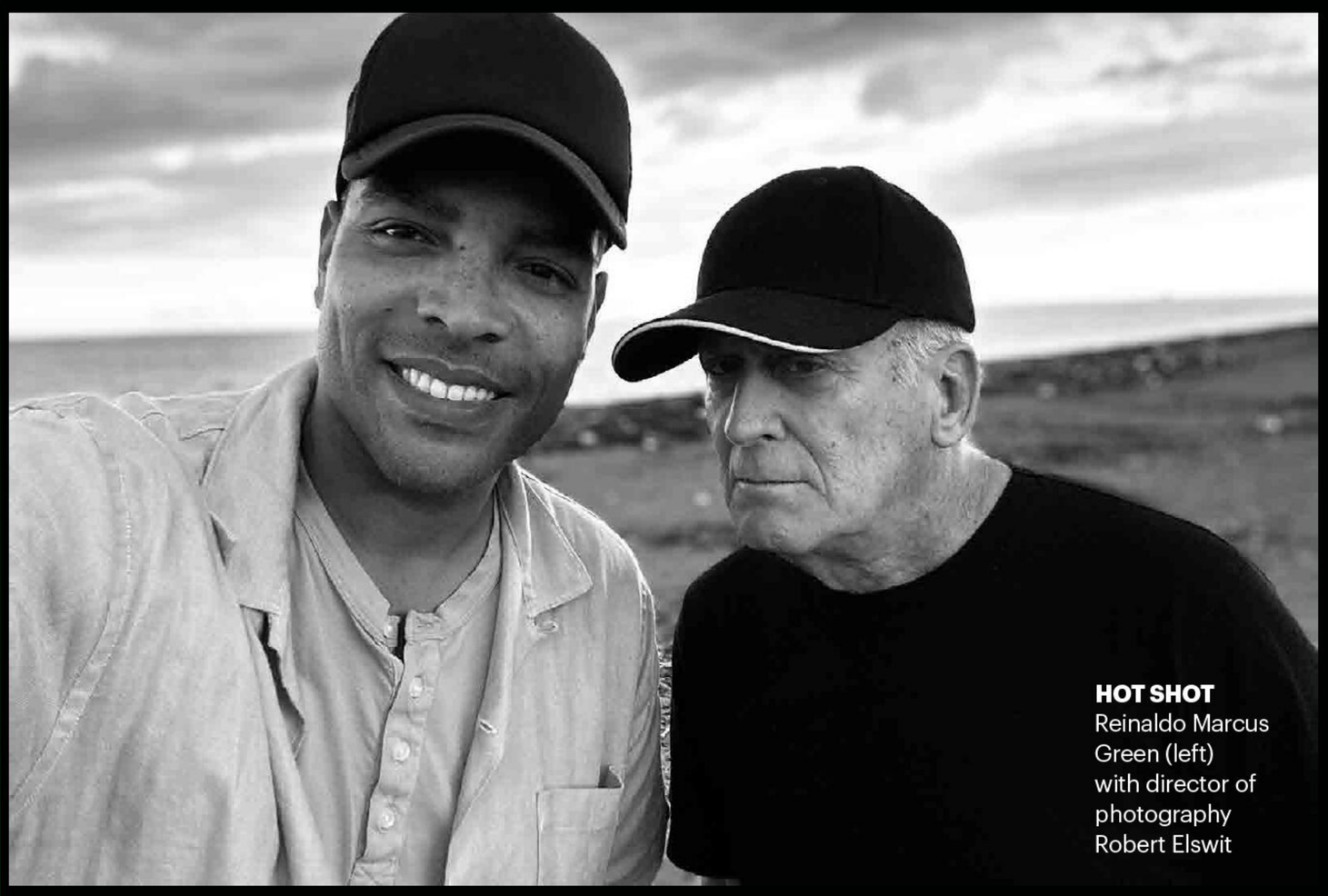
There was also the challenge of playing guitar. Ben-Adir taught himself, spending hours trawling through basic tutorials on YouTube, and reached a proficient standard. He learnt to sing, too, with the film's final cut blending his own vocals with those of Marley's. And in a bizarre meeting of two worlds, these preparations began when he found himself on-set in the pink plastic-fantastic world that defined Greta Gerwig's box-office smash, *Barbie*, in which he plays one of many incarnations of Ken. "The funny thing is that I found playing Bob to be an emotionally intense experience, but *Barbie* was no less so the case," he surprisingly admits. "My character goes into the big battle in that film, and he feels like he's going to lose his best friend, Big Ken, and maybe even his life."

While undeniably starker in *One Love*, mortality is a theme shared by both films. *One Love* begins with the assassination attempt that almost claimed Marley's life in December 1976, before charting the years he spent in London making the seminal *Exodus* album. Later, it traces his historic performance at

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

KINGLSEY WEARS TOP BY **WALES BONNER AT SELFRIDGES**, TROUSERS BY **AMIRI**, WATCH BY **TAG HEUER**

KINGSLEY WEARS JACKET, SHIRT AND TIE BY **GANT**, JEANS BY **PAUL SMITH**, TRAINERS BY **REEBOK AT SCHUH**, WATCH BY **OMEGA**



HOT SHOT
Reinaldo Marcus Green (left) with director of photography Robert Elswit

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

KINGSLEY BEN-ADIR

the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, Jamaica, in April 1978, which sought to bring unity at a time of mass political unrest.

Marcus Green says that *City Of God*, the noughties crime epic which tackled gang life in Rio De Janeiro, proved to be an unlikely inspiration. "I was leaning towards the idea of making our own *City of God*," he says. "We wanted to make a raw, gritty film that has music in it. That film was a real touchstone because it offers so much in understanding the politics of Brazil without going into it. We wanted to do that for Jamaica. We're making a film big on scale, but we wanted to make it feel intimate."

This intimacy extends to the portrayal of Bob Marley, the man, too, Ben-Adir insists. The film focuses on the creation of *Exodus*, but it also looks at Marley's personal flaws, too. "I had lots of private conversations with Bob Marley's family that will stay between us, but they helped me to understand the struggles he went through on a personal level as a child, and it breaks your heart for any child to go through what he did," says Ben-Adir. "Bob had undiagnosed complex PTSD. It's not to say there wasn't love in his family, but the streets were rough back then, and Jamaica was a tough place. It was a tough place to be small and light-skinned. Bob was mixed race, and I knew that before because I am mixed race too, but not everyone does know that.

"Bob became a tough guy as a result of that adversity. There's this westernised image of him, the university campus image of him. But Bob was a boss. He was a tough, tough guy. The Wailers called him Skip, they called him the general, and he was a disciplinarian in the studio, and he could look after himself."

The cameras began rolling in London in late 2022, before heading to Jamaica in the early portion of last year to capture some of the film's most integral scenes. They included that pivotal moment at the 1978 One Love Peace concert when Marley famously got Michael Manley (the then leader of the ruling People's National Party) and his political rival Edward Seaga (leader of the opposing Jamaica Labour Party) to join each other on stage and shake hands.

> "Marley's family helped me to understand the struggles he went through as a child, and it breaks your heart for any child to go through what he did"

Over a Christmas break in filming, Ben-Adir took to finessing Bob's on-stage movements and found a through-line in the unlikeliest of places. "I was trying to understand Bob's dancing because you can't choreograph him; he was so kind of wild and free and instinctive. But when I used technology to isolate instruments, you could realise that Bob was following the conducting of the drum." To illustrate the point further, Ben-Adir suddenly rises from his chair and begins moving like Marley – almost like giving Rolling Stone UK our own private performance. "The reason he dances differently in every song is because the drums are different in every song. I would just rehearse playing the drum beat and the lyrics, and it started to make sense. He's completely telling the drummer what to do through his movements, and I thought that was quite astonishing. He was leading the band through his movements."

Further inspiration struck when he watched *Stop Making Sense*, Jonathan Demme's legendary film that captures the art-rock band Talking Heads in concert over four nights at Hollywood's Pantages Theatre. "I put it on and was struck by David Byrne doing a similar thing. I couldn't work out what it was, but then I looked at the drums, and it was just so similar. I thought, 'Yes, that's it.'" In rehearsals, he recalls getting drummer Hector Roots Lewis – who plays The Wailers' Carlton Carly Barrett – to play the funk music of James Brown to get the actors warmed up. "It was just so much fun. I found the dancing and the guitar and the singing so much fun once you get over the embarrassment of looking like an idiot."

Looking like an idiot? "Well, you have to make mistakes in order to get to the goal," he expands. "The best actors are brave and courageous, and they're not scared of making a fool of themselves, and I've definitely got better at that. As I've got older, I couldn't give a fuck. I'm now honestly at the point where I'll just say 'What do you need me to do? Let's do

it because I know it's all in service of trying to find the story.'"

That sense of empowerment comes from his time playing another 20th-century icon. "It's all Regina King who let me play Malcolm X, that's who I owe it to. She trusted in me and believed me when everyone else was telling her the opposite. She gave me full creative freedom. She didn't know what she was doing for me at the time, but she gave me an opportunity I'd been hoping and dreaming of since I was 16. She let me fly," he says of his Hollywood break-out.

When asked who his detractors were when he was tackling the role of Malcolm X, Ben-Adir suddenly sits forward in his chair, deep in thought and pauses for a moment. "There was a lot of pressure to cast someone who was African American, but the African-American actor, who was very high profile, dropped out of the movie two weeks before. And if you do write about this, the full context is very important," he clarifies.

"The part was turned down again by three or four people, and it was an emergency situation. She was starting filming in three or four weeks, and she needed the actor to come and play Malcolm, who was able to elevate that text. I was available, and what's important is her trust in me on-set to try things out and wanting to show Malcolm in a different way – his gentle spirit. Regina and I just really aligned in that way."

From the hour spent in Ben-Adir's company, it's clear that he is a man with a point to prove with his biggest role yet. His commitment to nailing the smallest aspects of Marley's personality shows an admirable commitment to his craft. One thing he stopped short of, however, is the extreme method acting that some actors have recently resorted to for biopics. Most notably, Austin Butler admitted that he didn't see his family for three years while filming *Elvis* and even spoke in the King's distinctive Memphis drawl for the whole shoot. "Just to be clear, everyone's got their own way they work, and I can be around any actor as long as they bring their A-game, and Austin definitely brought his to that film," he says thoughtfully, evidently keen to avoid any misinterpretation or to be drawn into a headline-driven war of words.

BY YOUR SIDE
Lashana Lynch stars as wife Rita

"Kingsley's commitment to Bob and my culture makes me emotional. Him embodying Bob was like nothing I'd ever seen"
— Lynch

"He did what he needed in order to create that incredible performance, but I tend to stay in more of a deep concentration for the whole project. I'd say five minutes before we start rolling, I'll need to concentrate and go from there. I've always thought you need to be prepared for the reality that it's 7am, and they could be shooting your biggest scene. Football is a good comparison because those guys need to be ready from the minute that the ref blows the whistle, and I kind of look at it like that."

Alongside Ben-Adir as Marley, the film boasts an impressive roll call of British talent. *Happy Valley* lead James Norton appears as Island Records founder Chris Blackwell, while Lashana Lynch – best known for her turn as MI6 agent Nomi in Bond film *No Time to Die* – appears as Marley's wife Rita. On screen, Ben-Adir and Lynch's intense chemistry replicates that of Bob and Rita, who famously stood by each other despite a string of extra-marital affairs on both sides. "The work that Lashana has done on this film speaks for itself," says Ben-Adir. "It's incredible, and whenever Lashana was on set, it was always a better day. She just brings an intelligence and a sense of grounded sensitivity to everything she does, and she was always looking out for me."

Lynch, who is of Jamaican descent, similarly explains how Ben-Adir was at huge pains to offer a true and rounded portrayal of Marley. "He doesn't know this, but thinking on Kingsley's commitment to Bob and my culture actually makes me emotional," she says. "I hadn't worked with an actor who lives, eats, breathes and takes such delicate care when protecting the human they are portraying. In many moments, I became Rita off the back of my want for protecting Kingsley on set. He gives an unbelievable amount to his craft, so part of my job was to ensure this man was protected at all costs. Seeing him draw sweat from embodying Bob energetically was like nothing I'd ever seen. In return, I'll applaud him forever."

PARAMOUNT PICTURES. GROOMING BY LIZ TAW AT THE WALL GROUP USING OMOROVICZA; FASHION ASSISTANT: SCOTT CRUFT

KINGSLEY WEARS BLAZER, TOP AND TROUSERS BY **AMI PARIS**, OVERCOAT BY **FLORENCE BLACK**

Sting

‘I’ve Slept with Pilgrims by the Roadside and in the Palaces of the Maharajas’

IN A CHAT AHEAD OF HIS RETURN TO MUMBAI TO HEADLINE LOLLAPALOOZA INDIA IN JANUARY, THE LEGENDARY ARTIST TALKS ABOUT ACTIVISM, ACTING AND HIS LEGACY

BY ANURAG TAGAT

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

FOR ANYONE going into the Sting headline set at Lollapalooza India in Mumbai this past weekend without any prior research of setlists and the like, the cheer that went up when the New York-based British artist launched into The Police song "Message In A Bottle" was loud and euphoric.

A few hours prior at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Colaba, Sting – dressed all in black, seated with his legs crossed and a pair of glasses tucked inside in his pocket – told *Rolling Stone India* that his gig was going to be all about the hits that people will recognize. "But my job really is not to try and reproduce the recording at all, we have much more of a jazz sensibility, and that you'll recognize the head of the song. But every night I'm searching for something that I haven't found before, I haven't discovered before. I'm led by my curiosity," he says.

The 72-year-old Gordon Sumner – celebrated musician, actor (on stage and in front of cameras) and activist, among other things – is erudite, cheeky and frank in his responses about everything involving his craft. He even goes on to say that each night's show "can go into a disaster or go to a triumph." He adds, "I hope it's a triumph tonight."

A triumph it was, by most estimates, especially for a veteran artist who was headlining a recently established multi-genre music festival that had previously brought down acts like Imagine Dragons and The Strokes in their first edition in 2023. Sting has been in music for more than 50 years, unlike any of last year's international draws. Even at Lollapalooza India 2024, he was there amongst pop stars Halsey and The Jonas Brothers (who were reportedly catching Sting from stage-side).

Following his Mumbai performance, Sting traveled to Jaisalmer to continue his association with the country he visited first in 1980 with The Police bandmates Stewart Copeland and Andy Summers. In a chat with *Rolling Stone India*, Sting looks back at the India memories right from 1980, acting in shows like *Only Murders In The Building* and his legacy.

Rolling Stone India: Welcome back to India.
Sting: Wonderful to be back. I haven't played in Bombay in 44 years. I mean it seems ridiculous, it seems like yesterday... It's lovely to be back here. I was there earlier this morning at the venue and it looks to be exciting.

You've visited here outside of performances as well, right?

I've been here a lot. I spent a lot of time in the Himalayas, trekking. I went to Gangotri and Yamunotri, walked from Hrishikesh. I've slept with pilgrims by the roadside and I've slept in the palaces of the Maharajas. [laughs] I've played in New Delhi and Bangalore, and so I think I have a good perspective on India, its complexity, its contradictions and I love it. I find it very stimulating.

Can you take us back to 1980, when you first visited Mumbai with The Police? What were your first impressions of the country?

"I tend to write music first, with the philosophy that if you compose music well, it already has a narrative. It's telling you a story. I hear stories, when I hear music, some people see colors, I hear stories – characters, situations. And so the music writes the lyric. I am just the conduit, I think."

Well, I think I had culture shock. It was so different to where I come from. I'm from the north of England, you know, it's very grey. It's very industrial. Mumbai in 1980 was a very different city to what it is now, there were no high rises. There was this one [Taj Mahal Palace hotel], I stayed here. We were the guests of the Jazz Club of Mumbai, which was a group of Parsi ladies, very posh Parsi ladies. And they invited us as part of the Jazz Festival. I'm not sure they knew what they were getting [laughs]. But I remember we played in this beautiful amphitheater, open air. And it seemed like the whole of India was represented in that audience. There were thousands of people outside who couldn't get in. I was a little frustrated, because they were curious. But I remember being as curious about the audience as they were about us, because nobody knew whether it would work or not. It was such a different thing. We were the first rock band into Mumbai. After the end of 90 minutes, it was a normal rock and roll reaction. Everybody was enthusiastic and yelling and screaming and [it was] very exciting. I'll never forget it. It was such a vivid memory, and I longed to come back. So this invitation to play the Lollapalooza festival was something I said [claps hands] No problem, please, I'm coming.

Your association with Indian music also seemed to have kept going since then, and perhaps before that too. You've worked with artists like Anoushka Shankar and Karsh Kale. What draws you to Indian music?
I think that the culture is so, so rich. The history is so rich and I'm a student of music and so to come here and listen to raaga, you know, trying to clap with it [claps hands referring to taal]. Very difficult. It's a different mindset. Indian classical music is totally different than Western classical music. There's so much to learn of rhythmically. [Jazz-fusion pioneer and guitarist] John McLaughlin is a good friend of mine, you know and he's another student of Indian music, obviously, you know that. So there's always something to learn and I'm hoping to learn something while I'm here.

As far as collaborations go, you had the song "Dreaming" come out with Marshmello and P!nk. What do you seek out in collaborators at this stage in your career?
It's a great privilege to work with other musicians, especially when they're reinterpreting one of my songs, because they will bring something to the song that I hadn't anticipated. They can also bring an audience to one of my songs that I wouldn't get. Marshmello is a very successful electronic dance music, and so he has an audience. P!nk, too, has a different audience to me. So it's, it's a win-win situation. It's great fun to do. But also commercially, you're expanding your influence, you're expanding the power of the song. So I never say no, I'm always curious what people want to do.

Is there someone on your list to collaborate with right now?
I was gonna have a meeting last night with A.R. Rahman. But he got stuck in an airport somewhere. So it didn't happen. We'll meet eventually and we'll discuss a collaboration, perhaps.

What comes faster or easier – lyrics or music first? There's an eloquence in your lyrics but the music too is sometimes quite complex and elegant.
The simple answer is nothing comes easily. No, I wish I was that kind of genius where music just flows out of me. It doesn't, I have to work hard. I tend to write music first, with the philosophy that if you compose music well, it already has a narrative. It's telling you a story. I hear stories, when I hear music, some people see colors, I hear stories – characters, situations. And so the music writes the lyric. I am just the conduit, I think.

Activism has long been part of your life. What we've seen in more recent years, as the world gets increasingly online, is that activism sometimes gets perceived and dismissed as performative. Does that bother you?
Well, I mean, let's take an example – I have been interested in what I can do in a positive way to help the environment for 30 years. Using my position as a platform to say [that] if we keep burning our forests down, we're all going to be in trouble. I was attacked for that and they thought it was just performative. It wasn't. And frankly, after 30 years, I wish I'd been wrong. I really do.

But I wasn't wrong. We're now realizing that the destruction of the forests in the Amazon is related directly to the changes in climate and change in weather. We're all suffering from it. Frankly, it's the poor people of the world who are in the front line of this – flooding… storms. We're not immune in the West, either. I live in New York City, I could be flooded as well as and in London. So I think all of us need to listen to what scientists are telling us, not what politicians are telling us, because they're generally lying [laughs].

Speaking of New York, I went past the Belnord Building, which is the Arconia in the series *Only Murders In The Building*, which you were part of in season one. We've heard what the showrunners had to say about how they got you on board, but what was your experience like?
Well, I was acting [smiles]. I suppose it was a version of me. It's a little bit crazy.

So you don't break into song whenever you want?
No [laughs]. What was funny is that they give you a script when you agree to do it. But that's not the script they use. They improvise and so you have to be on your toes. And they say something to you that's not in the script. So you have to… I mean, it's fun. There's the scene in the elevator, where the dog bites me, and I say, 'I don't like dogs.' It's not true. I actually love dogs. But he [Martin Short's character] said, 'But you have a dog.' I said, 'I don't like him either!' That was completely ad-lib [laughs].

You've been on stage and in front of the camera over the years. How do you switch between modes as an actor, if you have to?
I never had an ambition to be an actor. I acted in films by accident. I had the right look. I did about 12 movies, some good, some terrible. I prefer acting on stage because I have more control, it's closer to what I do normally when I sing. Acting on film, you have to be so patient. It's really a director's medium, and you just have to wear the right clothes and say the right lines and then do it 50 times. My preference is to act in plays. I like that.

You've branched out to do so many different things across decades. Compared to when you started out to now, have you changed what you'd want to be remembered for, in terms of legacy? I feel like it changes for all of us as human beings, not just for artists.
I think up till about 10 years ago, I would have said my legacy are my songs – the songs I wrote for The Police, the songs I wrote for my own career. But now I would say my legacy, the one I'm most fond of, is *The Last Ship*, which became a Broadway show and a touring show in Britain and Europe. And there's a very strong possibility that it may become an opera with a big chorus and orchestra. So that is an exciting adventure for me. I also think it's about something very personal to me. It's about my community, where I come from, the people I was brought up with, and also about my escape from that. So if I have to sort of say what's my legacy, at the moment, it's that. But you're right, it will change. I also have six children and seven grandchildren, so that's a legacy as well.

What are your plans in India, outside of the performance here at Lollapalooza?
While I'm here? I'm going back to Rajasthan tomorrow. I'm going to Jaisalmer, which is one of my favorite cities. I'm here for another three days.

COURTESY OF LOLLAPALOOZA INDIA

ERIC NAM BRINGS HIS SOUND TO INDIA

"I'm very excited. I've been looking forward to this." Nam opens up ahead of performing in India and talks more about his journey, his songs, and how impacting people remains at the core of what he does

BY DEBASHREE DUTTA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KARTIK KHER

“I cannot wait to see everybody; I cannot wait to re-experience the people, the culture, the food, and everything about India. I hope everybody comes ready to dance, ready to sing, and have a good time.”

ON AN ODDLY COLD and rainy day in my city last week, I was tearing my hair over an unstable network shortly before this interview. That night, at 10:30 p.m. IST, Eric Nam was joining me on Zoom to go over his impending gig in India at Lollapalooza 2024. And there he was, just in time; only the anticipatory anxiety in me came true thanks to awful weather and spotty internet. We got off to a shaky start, and Nam was like, "Sorry, I didn't catch the second part of your question" and "Could you please repeat? It's choppy" a couple of times while I whistled in the dark, to keep it cool. However, and thankfully, better along the way, we had roughly a 40-minute conversation—unfolding a freewheeling artist. One wearing his heart on his sleeves through music, who creates what he feels, is willing to challenge himself persistently, explore unchartered territories, and loves India—he is "so stoked" to finally return to India.

How does connecting with an Indian audience [live] make you feel ahead of the concert? I ask, "I'm very, very excited. I have been looking forward to this," he says. Anecdotally, he hasn't been back to India since 2011. "I imagine there's a lot that has changed in 13 years, and I've never performed in India either. So, I'm very curious, I'm very excited, and it's with a lot of anticipation to know what the crowd in India will be like. But more than anything, I think that for the fans who are there to see me, I'm going to bring out a lot of the old hits but also some of the new ones, and we're going to have a good time and dance, hopefully like no one's watching," he adds.

The Asian-American singer-songwriter, performer, and media personality has come a long way. Setting off through the Korean TV show *Star Audition: Birth of a Great Star 2*, which unveiled a career in South Korea (2011–2012), he headed to release his maiden EP, Cloud 9 (2013). En route, he gained steam as a host alongside subsequent music releases, a slew of international tours, and significantly more, consolidating his renown over time.

It's been quite an experience, though. He went out without a map, relying only on his gut and what he was feeling. "Nothing in my life acquainted me with doing music until I just did it," he remarks. Nam was supposed to be a consultant and an analyst at Deloitte. So, he took this big leap. "I had to go to Korea to build a career to then be able to try to reverse and generate back in the States and use that like a pop artist but also like a K-pop artist, to, like, you know, tour the world and do shows like Lollapalooza. It has been a while."

I cock an ear closer to my laptop as Nam opens up about his journey, what his sound essentially captures, and how impacting people remains the centerpiece of what he does, while simultaneously comprehending the need to be at peace with what he maintains is so important—that he should create something and people should listen to it. "Creating is a form of therapy for me. I have to create for myself, and I have to be selfish," he says. And in a bid, he has been on it, making a career that feeds his artistic passion but navigating challenges in the process—one being how the world sees him.

I ask him about it and a gamut of other things, working way up into the exchange—like, he's been seeking answers to questions raised in his songs—striving to live up to his full potential and pursue success, happiness, love, and other objectives. He has always had a fascination with trying to understand cultures and places that seem so different, for instance. Stands to reason his interest in visiting India. "It's also literally on the other side of the world." "So, it feels so distant," in his words, yet he feels connected in that with some of his Indian friends, he shares a commonality of values and morals.

As it turns out, Nam is never done indulging in his heartfelt explorations and experiencing the world—his current stop is India, and he dubs the whole thing a "fun process," also one that he can "learn from and feel a lot out of." It encompasses how he makes himself distinct and manifests with what he creates and puts out. And his honest replies incrementally reiterate that. Here are the condensed excerpts.

Engaging with and experiencing the best of both domestic and international music has become what Lollapalooza is. Any specific artist or performance you're looking forward to?
I'm looking forward to Kenny Beats. I've heard some great things about his show. I'm also obviously very excited for my friends, The Rose. We have been on tour pretty much on the same timeline, but we haven't been able to catch up with each other. So, I'm hoping that I'll be able to see them.

And then Sting [Obviously]. He's a legend, and I think younger audiences might not realize how much he has influenced so many songs and music and how cool it is to be able to hear him and Kenny both.

And then finally, OneRepublic is a band that I loved when I was growing up, particularly in college. I went to see them in Boston when nobody knew about them, and I was like, "Oh my God, this is great!" I have seen them multiple times, but I haven't seen them since college. So, I'm very excited to hear them.

As a Korean American guy from Georgia, traveling to Korea to be able to tour, sing, and perform all over the world must have been crazy and time-consuming. I would like to hear more about this experience.
Yeah, I mean, it has been a crazy ride, you know. I think the hardest thing has been that there isn't a blueprint and there are a lot of people who have had to do it the way that I have had to do it because to be specific, there aren't many Korean American singers or K-pop artists. And so, for so many of us, we are figuring it out as we go because we haven't traditionally fully belonged in either category. We haven't fully belonged in Korea, and we haven't fully belonged in America, but somewhere in the middle. And to have to create a career path and a trajectory of how the world sees or treats you is a challenge. And that's a challenge on top of the challenge of being or becoming a musician in and of itself. So, it's been very complex. But I think it's been a lot of great learning and I want to say, I was trying things I haven't done before which has been hard but at the same time rewarding.

Does your concert repertoire include a song that you always have to perform?
There's like two or three, that we always have to do. "Love Die Young" is one we always have to do, and "Honestly" is another one that we always have to do. "Honestly" was like K-pop but doing it on my terms, and then "Love Die Young" was my first English release that was part of my first English album.

After the show, do you have plans to spend a little more time in India—maybe visiting some places, exploring the city, sampling Indian food?
I absolutely would love to. However, I am straight off back to another schedule; I have some shootings that I have to do. But I guess I would be there a little bit early. I have a few days, so I'm hoping to try the food and explore some of the places when I get there early. So, I am very excited about that.

You mentioned your affinity for Indian culture and music in one of our previous interviews. I'm curious about when and what exactly piqued your interest in things Indian.
First of all, India is massive. And so, I feel it's a place you can explore forever and always come across new things. I think that's something I remember because India is so big and overwhelmingly large and there are so many people; it's like, where do you even begin? It's overwhelming to think about and process this. But I've always had a fascination with trying to understand cultures and places that seem so different. That's why I was very interested in visiting India in the first place, and once I got there, I realized, "Wow!" The movies are so different, the songs are so different, the colors, the fashion—everything is so different. And not that I even have a baseline understanding of what's going on, but to be in it, be open to it, and try to embrace it—to me, it's a very fun process. But also, one that I can learn from and feel a lot out of. I think that's always been my fascination, and again, I'm not very well versed, and I haven't been back in so long. So, I'm very excited to go to kind of do it all over again and to try to experience as much as possible.

Is anything new coming soon in terms of an Indian artist you're collaborating with?
I can't tell you [laughs]. I don't know exactly what's going on, where, or how yet. But, you know, if and when there is, you'll be the first to know; *Rolling Stone India* will be the first to know.

You have been making incredible content where you give artists, especially those from K-pop, a platform to be transparent and honest about their mental health and personal lives. Was there a personal reason behind you creating this property, or because mental health is just so relevant?
I think we started it because people in our community wanted it. We were having a conversation about a

podcast, and our community was like, "We like this content," and for us, we were like, "Oh, okay," but "How do we do this? How do we figure it out?" because everybody is talking about it in a way that is helping them and enjoying the stuff that we are doing, so we were like, "Can we make it more structured and make it a platform and more sustainable?" At the same time, for me, it was very scary when we were going through the first iterations of it because I was talking about things that I had never talked about publicly. I was talking about my struggles, my pains, and my obstacles. And not a lot of people have done that, especially those coming from K-pop. So, I was very nervous.

But you know, I'm very glad that we did it because, as I'm on tour and (as we've been doing activities with Mindset), we meet so many people who'd be like, "Thank you for what you do because this has positively impacted my life and my mental health," and as an artist and as a person, impacting people through music, art, or a film is always like a big focal point of what we do. But to do it with the stories of who we are and what we've lived is also just as important and very valuable. So, yeah, that's kind of how we came across that journey.

What do you think is the best way to sustain and thrive for an artist in a rapidly changing environment?

Honestly, it's pretty difficult; it's pretty challenging because media changes constantly and the platforms are changing constantly. Algorithms seem to be more important than ever, and I think that's kind of the most difficult part. When I'm in a songwriting session or when I'm talking to my artist friends, we're like, "Okay, but what is the algorithm? Can it feed people?" So, we have lost a lot of what feels like a natural discovery—people searching for good music and searching for what they like.

Our platforms are kind of a beat to us, and so that's what I think is the trickiest part. We have to write and think in a certain way, writing for the algorithm. But that's weird, for I think artists should be creating what is true and honest and resonates with them. So, that's a challenging part. Also, people's attention spans are so short. We so quickly forget what we watched and what we consumed, so our music is losing value in front of people. For most artists, we spend months and years working on something, and within a matter of a few hours, minutes, or days, it would be like moving on. So, I would be lying if I said that it's not difficult.

There are times when it's discouraging, and at times it gets very difficult, but the way I think about it is that creating is a form of therapy for me, something that I love to do and appreciate. And I just can't create for other people; I have to create for myself, and I have to be selfish. That in itself is a very difficult thing to come to terms with, especially as an Asian-American. As an Asian, I feel we're always told to mind our manners and think of other people and what people around us are going to think—that's so much a part of how we've grown up. But in art and creativity, I think it is about "me." It is about "I." You have to be selfish. How does this make you feel? How do you want to create it? What do you want to say? What do you feel is so important that you should create it and people should listen to it? which is kind of at odds with how I've been raised and many others perhaps, and so, coming to terms with that and fighting for yourself and advocating for yourself is the thing that I'm learning, and at the end of the day, if I'm happy with it and feel fulfilled, then that's all that should matter.

"I'm trying my best to live and be the best version of myself that I can be, pursuing happiness, love, relationships, success, and whatever it may be in the best way possible."

Over the years, your career has flourished, and you have engaged in a variety of activities, including singing, creating songs, hosting shows, doing interviews, and much more, to the point where you are also a household name on television. Have you ever felt that maybe this was negatively affecting your music?

I think there was a point when I was so busy doing other things that I didn't have the time or the energy to put into music. That's probably what made it most difficult and negatively affected my music. But it's a catch-22 situation because I think the media and the world, we live in thrive on trends like who's hot and who's not. So, the hardest part was that I had to do all these other things to create buzz and relevance and be on trend, but also create music, albums, and tour.

It's just so many things to do at once. And that's just kind of the life of a solo artist, which is very hard. I look at peers who are in a group, and if they have 10 members, one or two of them can do the TV, one or

two of them can do the radio, and one or two can do YouTube—split the responsibilities. But for me, I never had that, so being constantly booked and busy, which is a blessing—don't get me wrong, I'm very grateful—just made it hard to spend time on my music. I think that was difficult sometimes.

Your songs are deep and tell stories, I feel. Which song—that one—made you feel truly happy and convinced that it best captured your feelings, how you live, who you are, and your essence?
I think it's going to be "House on a Hill," because I think it is like a universal song for people who are living life in today's time and age where we see so much and we're exposed to so many things that we all have, like this goal, this northern star that we're trying to get to.

It could be [literally] like a house on a hill; it could be some degree or job or wealth or a relationship, whatever it may be—that is the "House on a Hill." What I'm trying to get there—the people around us, what other people have, the things around us—can be very distracting. It can seem and feel as if everybody has everything because the grass is always greener, and the sky is always bluer on the other side. But, if and when you get there, you're often left feeling like, "Okay, I have it; now what?" Like, "Oh, I have this beautiful crazy car that I thought I wanted, but the person next to me has a different color, like the newer model or the model with a little bit of an upgrade." There is always going to be something bigger and better than what you have. And so, to me, I think it's trying to say, let's live in the now, let's live in the moment, appreciate what we have already, and not too much worry about keeping up with our peers or the people around us and finding that happiness in the process or the happiness within you, which is, you know, a very complex thing to share within a three-minute song.

Even a few days ago, I was rehearsing and going through meetings and talking to people, and this idea kept coming to me: just be grateful for what we have. We just have to be very, very grateful. So, that's why "House on a Hill" might be the song that kind of best represents who and where I am right now as a person.

Your songs raise questions regarding life, love, and the spectrum of emotions one may experience, as you have pointed out on various occasions. Have you found an answer yet?
I think the answer changes every day. I don't think there's an answer, but even if there's an answer, it's important to think about it. If you're pondering these thoughts and these questions, I think it channels your intentions and how you live your life. Because so much of what we pursue in life is these things. That's why many of us live, work, study, and do what we do. To do it aimlessly may seem meaningless and not as fruitful. But I'm trying my best to live and be the best version of myself that I can be, pursuing happiness, love, relationships, success, and whatever it may be in the best way possible. I think that there is value in that.

When an initiative fails or you receive a negative review, it's easy for an artist to become overwhelmed and start doubting things. What are your thoughts on this?
I think it's more about finding value in the creation and the project itself than the reviews or feedback from critics or audiences. I think as an artist, you're creating with the best intentions to tell your story or whatever it is that you want to express in the best way possible. And sometimes, maybe, that doesn't come through. That's unfortunate; you just have to figure out what you could have done differently to get that message across. But at the end of the day, you also have to take time and think it's okay. You created what you felt you needed to create and put it out to the world. And there is value in just having accomplished that. There is value enough.

I think so much of our time in society we spend wanting the validation of others, and if we get it, it's great, but I don't think it's the healthiest thing for that to be the only thing that we hang our hat on. And I think I learned that early on in my career because, even doing TV, I've done so many TV shows, either as a guest, as a host or as a cast member. And like, you want everything to be great; you want everything to be the buzz of the town, to be trending, and to get all the good reviews, but it's not all in your power. There are so many other things that go into it. There are so many other people—there's a director, there are other cast members, there's the editors, there's the music people—what time it is being broadcast, what network is it on, is there anything else competing? These things can apply to music as well, or anything that we put out. So, there are so many other things that are not in your control that just happen. You can't change it, but you just have to accept it and say, "I put my best effort forward, and that's all that matters."

You also acted in the psychological suspense movie *Transplant*, correct? How did that happen?
I was on tour, and they were like, "Hey, there's a great script that's getting made in the coming months, and we think you should audition for it," and so we did a lot of auditioning. A lot of reading, a lot of taping, and I went through this entire process, and I got the role, and we shot that. It was a very difficult project for me; I've never acted before. And like you were saying, it's a psychological thriller, so it wasn't an easy role. There was a lot to think about and a lot to process. I was stressed constantly, but I learned a lot. To me, it has kind of given me this curiosity about the world of film and TV and acting and writing. That's kind of where I'd love to spend some more time in the coming years figuring that part out and challenging myself more.

Perhaps you're thinking of doing a K-drama?
Yeah, I mean with K-dramas, traditionally I've always kind of said "no," and I've always kind of stayed away because I wasn't very confident in that, and I was like, "I don't know if I can do a good job at it." But now I'm feeling, "Why not?" If the right role comes up and if the right opportunity comes up, then I'll just go for it and try it. I think what I have to be okay with is that I can't control everything. There will be others, there will be writers, and there will be people who will work with me to make sure that I'm making the best choices as an actor in whatever role that I'm playing, and I just have to trust them. So, if they see it in me and I see it in myself, and we just trust each other, then we can try it out; we can try to have some fun on a K-drama. I'll be down.

What are the things you wish you had understood earlier that you understand now?
You know, one thing I keep coming back to is saying to create for yourself and interest your gut instinct. I think that took me a long time to come to terms with. It's like trusting your gut, believing in it, and giving yourself full authority. It's hard because when you're young and when you're not experienced, you're like, "Is this right?" Everybody seems like they are making things up in the process; it's all about how they feel. But your feelings and my feelings are just as valid as anybody else's. Maybe I'm not as experienced, but there is truth to that feeling and to that emotion. And so, making sure that you listen to yourself—I think that is invaluable, and it's also what makes a great artist. I think someone very much in tune with their emotions and feelings should put that into a song, a TV show, a film, or something.

In the same vein, just start. Just start earlier. I think I was terrified because I didn't know where to start or how to start. When I debuted, I was late. I was old, and people were saying I was old; I was 24 and they were like I was so old. I was like, "Oh! Okay, I guess I'm old, but I can still try." But I wish that even if I started a few years earlier, who knows what my life would be like? I have no idea. But I would like to think that I would have had more experience under my belt.

What is your upcoming song, album, or project that you're working on?
I have been touring a lot lately, so I haven't had time to put out new stuff after "House on a Hill." I'm still touring until May. I've tried to write a few things while I'm touring, but it's really hard. So, for now, let's just focus on putting on the best tour possible.

This year starts with India, and then we go through Asia in February, then Australia and New Zealand through March and April, and then let's see where life takes me and how I feel. I think if anything, it's about following that emotion, like what you want to create now. I think maybe there will be some changes in the musical direction. According to what I've been listening to recently, it has been very different. So, I think there might be some changes, but nothing that we have started or anything that we feel strongly enough for me to say like this is what's coming.

Your message before we wrap up
I'm very, very excited! So stoked to finally be going back to India. I cannot wait to see everybody; I cannot wait to re-experience the people, the culture, the food, and everything about it. I hope everybody comes ready to dance, ready to sing, and have a good time, and I think that's what music is about—coming together and having a really good time. So, I'm just excited, but it's going to be hot and humid, I think, so please stay hydrated, healthy, and safe, and I'll see you soon!

8TURN Is Here to Stay

IN THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, 8TURN SHARES MORE OF WHO THEY ARE, PRECISELY THE PERTINENT ASPECT THAT REFLECTS THEM, THE MUSIC THEY MAKE, AND HOW PROGRESSIVELY TEAMWORK IS MAKING A DREAM WORK

BY DEBASHREE DUTTA

elatively new to the block though, 8TURN—of MYUNG HO, JAE YUN, MIN HO, YOON SUNG, HAE MIN, KYUNG MIN, YUN GYU, and SEUNG HEON—shines replete with unrestricted potential, which also evokes an element of what 8TURN implies. "Number 8 represents our eight members, and 'TURN' literally implies that it's our turn!" notes SEUNG HEON, the youngest member, further elucidating, "Also, if you rotate the number 8 by 90 degrees, it becomes an infinity symbol. This represents our ambition to charm people as eight members with infinite possibilities."

A year into the business, several of their songs have amassed millions of views on YouTube. Last year, early this month, MNH Entertainment launched 8TURN, their rookie boy band, and shortly thereafter dropped their debut extended play, *8TURNRISE*, featuring the title track "TIC TAC," preceding the sophomore *UNCHARTED DRIFT* in June, with the EP's lead single "EXCEL." From the music to the performance, the body of work conveyed a strong sense of purpose, voicing an underlying conviction that 8TURN is an emerging force in K-pop that is here to stay; and they are evolving radically through time.

They come from diverse backgrounds and have distinct traits, yet they are united by an identical desire that speaks to their similarities and goals. While fostering individual dreams, as KYUNG MIN aptly remarks, "I kept thinking about my dream and realized that I wanted to become an idol. I did not give up and worked hard to achieve my dream." MIN HO says, "We grow and move forward together by aiming for the same goal and relying on each other!" That, in my mind, is the thread tying them together in the way they commit to fulfilling their dream. And they are doing it with aplomb.

COURTESY OF MNH ENTERTAINMENT

8TURN

8TURN has just put out their latest and third mini-album *STUNNING*, an ensemble of five tracks namely "THE GAME," "RU-PUM PUM," "NOM," "WE HERE," and "GLOW." From the hip-hop tune with an R&B vibe "THE GAME," to the resounding title track "RU-PUM PUM" manifesting 8TURN's self-confidence and natural charm—they are ramping up their game by the day. Such as the third track on the album, "NOM," has what team leader JAE YUN describes as "a very western Texas cowboy sort of vibe to it." "It's a very fun song, a very different sound to what you guys would expect from 8TURN," he adds. HAE MIN rates the fourth track, "WE HERE," as the most vocally expressive song of the record, while its final offering, "GLOW," is dedicated to the fans, "TURNING." "It contains our message, 'Everything has changed ever since we met TURNING,'" states MIN HO.

The act, in essence, is of stunning vocals, stunning movement, ingenuity, and an interplay that lets them showcase all of that. They are employing all chances to excel, proving their infinite musicality and skill, adding to the subtleties and singularity of their artistry.

In this exclusive interview, 8TURN shares more of that, precisely the pertinent aspect that reflects 8TURN, the music they make, and how progressively teamwork is making a dream work. Excerpts:

What made you realize that creating music, performing, and becoming an idol was what you wanted to accomplish?
MYUNG HO: Since I was young, I have loved music and singing. When I was at school, I joined a music club and was able to perform at the school festivals. Those performances and cheers brought me joy, and I have dreamt of becoming a singer ever since.
YUN GYU: The talent show I did during my middle school field trip was my first stage ever. I was very nervous before I went up on stage, but I was also excited and was looking forward to performing. Because it was a show to enjoy with my friends, I was able to find joy in sharing what I prepared for them. I believe I began dreaming of more stages since then.

How demanding is it to stake out the band in the grand scene of K-pop as a fairly newcomer in the industry? What most motivates you?
JAE YUN: Our motivation is all the singers who are actively participating in this industry with us. Just watching other artists perform motivates me in different ways. Our fans are also a big driving force. Because we have our fans, we'd like to share a better version of ourselves, making us practice more and try our best to show good aspects of ourselves.
KYUNG MIN: Our boss always gives us great advice! Those words comfort us and give us the strength to go through the tough times! We also try to do our best, thinking of our fans!

What are the collective strengths that you leverage to bring out the best in each other? Is there something distinctive to 8TURN, such as a unique selling proposition?

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"Our fans are a big driving force. Because we have our fans, we'd like to share a better version of ourselves"—JAE YUN

YOON SUNG: Each member has different ways of expressing and using their body when dancing. This inspires each of us by making us think, "Oh, I could express this in that way." I believe such synergy with each other is an advantage for the group.
YUN GYU: The fact that each of us has different strengths and charms is our advantage and strength as a group. Each member can step forward in different areas, such as great performance, melodic vocals, energetic rap, and shining appearances.

How, in your opinion, has the creative aspect of your work grown from its initial stages to here today?
MYUNG HO: I believe we were able to improve in terms of skills since we practiced every day and had time to grow! Also, our members have participated in writing the lyrics for *STUNNING*, which has made us able to participate in more ways in the album production. I also think all members have improved when it comes to their appearance.
MIN HO: I truly believe that we have improved in many ways! While it might differ from member to member, we get the moments to realize how much better we are in terms of skills when we monitor our stages. There are also moments when I, as a fellow member, wonder how much more we could improve in the future.

Is there a certain message you want to convey, a point you want to make, or something pertinent that reflects who you are when you make music? Who writes the songs, by the way, or is it a collaborative effort?
JAE YUN: Yeah, so our members have participated in writing the lyrics for the second and fifth tracks from *STUNNING*. They are the title track "RU-PUM PUM" and the fan-dedicated song "GLOW." I have a habit of writing down things that inspire me, ideas, or words, so I go through those memos and revise them when I write lyrics. For the fan-dedicated song, "GLOW," I wrote every word that I wanted to tell our fans in the memo and revised it to fit the song and the format of the lyrics!
MIN HO: I also participated in writing the lyrics for "GLOW." I often write down the moments that I am thankful for or that touched me about TURNING, so I was able to use that to write the words that I wanted to tell our fans. I think I did well.

Which songs have been a few of your favorites so far, and why?
KYUNG MIN: I especially like the songs in our first album! My favorite is the first track, "WE," for the unique energy that we were able to share with our music.
SEUNG HEON: My favorite is the fifth track, "Heartache," from our first album, *8TURNRISE*! I loved it as soon as I heard the song, and I always find it so cozy and comforting.

As a crucial component of your artistic skill set, your music videos feature dynamic choreography. What are your thoughts on the way it plays as a visual tool for communicating the essence of your songs?
JAE YUN: I believe that a music video is something more than just a visual representation of a song. I think K-pop is a unique genre that stimulates various senses just by playing a song and has the power to affect more than just the auditory sense. So, when I watch a music video, I think it can convey a message like a movie since it contains various people's thoughts and expressions while presenting the song's lyrics and music.
YOON SUNG: One of the biggest advantages that K-pop holds, I believe, is the visual aesthetics it provides along with auditory enjoyment. The music video is one of the key elements when it comes to this. We can incorporate the intended meaning of the song into it and capture the performance more splendidly.

How do you make each project you put together into something that gives listeners and viewers a more profound experience?
MYUNG HO: I try to make people empathize and feel the emotions that we have during our performances since I believe that music can deliver the message we want to share. I also hope that you can gain some energy from watching our performances!
HAE MIN: I pay a lot of attention to the vibe of the song because it connects to the stage and the result of our recording. If I interpret the unique vibe that the song has, I can express it in a cooler way and fill it up with an expression that is unique to myself.

***8TURNRISE* was your first extended play; *UNCHARTED DRIFT* was your second; and now it's *STUNNING*, your third mini album. What distinguishes this project from the others?**
YOON SUNG: The keyword we tried to express with our third album, like what we did with our first and second albums, is "confidence." In the first and second albums, we expressed confidence but did not have conviction. Rather, in this third album, we've tried to express the natural rizz and self-assurance. We also dyed our hair blonde! We think that stylish confidence like this is the color of our music.
YUN GYU: The message of "going our way" is consistent with our first and second albums. However, the third album embodies more of our rizz, confidence, conviction, and belief. Unlike the styles of the first and second albums, where we wore our pants backward, we all wore jumpsuits and dyed our hair blonde to highlight our confidence and show our image as one team.

You guys are surely bonded by music, are there other common interests as well? When 8TURN isn't rehearsing or working on music, how are you spending your free time?
MYUNG HO: When I am not working on our music, I tend to practice and dedicate my time to self-improvement. And I also get some break time in between. During these times, I tend to take a nap, play video games, eat something nice, and enjoy "me time."
KYUNG MIN: In my free time, I like to rest in our dorm and play video games. I often spend my free time eating, sleeping, and relaxing.

What are your upcoming projects? Are you planning global concerts, fan meetups, and the like?
MIN HO: We were able to have a fan concert and join our domestic promotions to share our charms in Korea. Also, we joined KCON in 2023 and had the opportunity to go abroad. However, it is a shame that we weren't able to show every aspect of ourselves with our solo concert. So, we hope to have more opportunities to show more aspects of ourselves to our fans abroad this year.
SEUNG HEON: We are planning to promote our group in Japan! TURNINGs in Japan! We are going to meet you in Japan! So please wait for us a little bit more and look forward to more mature versions of us! We would also love to meet all the TURNINGs around the world while having various promotions both domestically and internationally.

Your message to fans in India
HAE MIN: Namaste!! TURNINGs from India! Nice to meet you all! It's such a pity that we haven't been able to meet in person yet. If we get the chance, we'd love to show you our amazing performances, have a great time together, and create awesome memories together. Thank you!
YUN GYU: TURNINGs from India! Thank you for always supporting us. We promise to continue to move forward and meet you all in India in person! Please look forward to seeing us until that happens. Love you!

2000 - 2008

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Reviews

Music

RADIOHEAD'S SWEET SIDE HUSTLE

Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood create some low-key majesty with the Smile

By JON DOLAN

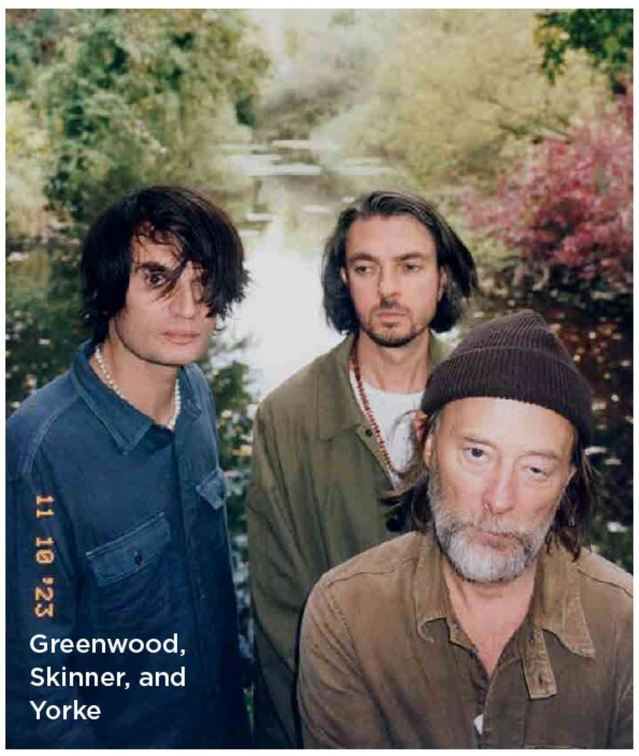
The Smile
Wall of Eyes
XL

The release of a new Radiohead album is greeted in certain circles as a kind of holy occasion, a time to drop everything and commence Deep Listening.

We have not witnessed such a hallowed event since 2016, when Radiohead dropped *A Moon Shaped Pool,* and a new album after such a wait sure would be welcome. Sometimes, though, it's nice to see what the members of a great band can do when working outside such weighty expectations. That's the story of the Smile, the excellent side band Radiohead singer Thom Yorke and lead guitarist Jonny Greenwood have formed with jazz drummer Tom Skinner. On the band's 2022 debut, *A Light for Attracting Attention,* the stakes were low, and the jams were loose.

The Smile are back with *Wall of Eyes,* a ➜

ILLUSTRATION BY
Nicole Rifkin



Greenwood, Skinner, and Yorke

→ THE SMILE

lavishly gorgeous second LP. No one is going to convene a Deep Listening Consortium to unpack its meaning, and that's part of the appeal. This music drifts, and we drift with it. "I can go anywhere that I want," Yorke sings against the spacious jazz rock of ambling "Friend of a Friend," adding, "just gotta turn myself inside out."

On the album's opening title track, Greenwood unspools some acoustic lullaby strum and Yorke coos anxiously as his voice pings amid elegiacally dissolving electro-acoustic folderol. And that's pretty much it for five transfixing minutes. "Teleharmonic" is ambiguous bliss, with Yorke making like a dyspeptic soul boy as the song's crinkly whir gathers around him until the effect almost feels hymnlike. On "Under Our Pillows," Greenwood's guitar contorts and glistens as Yorke's quavering voice slips in and out of focus, then the music fades unexpectedly into an ambient wash. With its Doppler-effect drum rumble, shadowy piano, archangel strings, and Yorke's enveloping mumble-blues vocalese, "I Quit" feels relentless and distracted, a brilliant balance of opposites.

The first Smile record rocked out a little more than recent Radiohead. This one is more subdued, but there are a couple of bangers. "Read the Room" is coiled and funky, with Greenwood splaying out coolly fractured notes over Skinner's tense groove, before the song lifts off into a sublime krautrock-y zone-out.

The album's intense emotional peak is the eight-minute "Bending Hectic." Greenwood creates a little galaxy of distended shimmering notes. Yorke sets a scene of driving on a mountainside in Italy, and then "letting go of the wheel." Skinner tensely pushes the beat, Greenwood's guitar ripples ominously, and Yorke goes over the edge, narrating a moment of dread that also creepily feels like a moment of freedom. Violent strings swell, and Greenwood's guitar explodes into some of the heaviest, meanest noise he's ever conjured, mirroring the cathartic collapse Yorke is evoking. It's the kind of terrifying grandeur these guys do better than anyone else. In any package it shows up in, we'll always take it. ®

FRANK LEBON

BRITTNEY SPENCER PROVES IT

A promising country star delivers a debut album worth waiting for By JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Brittney Spencer
My Stupid Life
ELEKTRA

Like most singers new in town, Brittney Spencer spent the bulk of her first decade in Nashville paying dues. She busked to passersby, sang backup for Carrie Underwood, and carved out a space for provocative songwriting in the city's Christian-worship-music community. Then, in 2020, in the wake of country music's reckoning with its long history of racial exclusion, Spencer uploaded a viral acoustic cover of the Highwomen's "Crowded Table." Since then, she's opened

for Willie Nelson and Megan Thee Stallion, sang at the CMAs, and even became an affiliate member of the Highwomen, the group whose song started it all.

But until *My Stupid Life,* a debut country record that's certain to cement Spencer's place in the genre, all of that seeming stardom had gone untested. The album takes a few songs to find its footing, but once it does, *My Stupid Life* lifts off and soars: It's hard to think of a stronger run on a country LP in recent memory than the five-song stretch beginning with the self-reclamation ballad "The Last Time" and ending with the tender heartbreak of "If You Say So." "The microwave love and toaster vows," she sings of the faltering new marriage in the latter, "can't bare the weight of us right now."

Spencer traverses a blend of muscular pop rock, textured soul, and anthemic singalong pop, all of it grounded squarely in a genre-agnostic country that conjures Maren Morris' landmark album *Hero.* (Morris, one of Spencer's foremost champions, looms large here, adding vocals on one song, getting name-dropped in another.) Spencer has assembled an ace team to showcase her versatile voice and incisive writing, including producer Daniel Tashian (Kacey Musgraves' *Golden Hour*). The result is a record unencumbered by the need to constantly prove its Nashville bona fides, and in doing so ends up being one of the more convincing country statements in some time.

My Stupid Life is a deftly told collection of stories that, like her "Crowded Table" cover, simmer with subtext. Underneath the sugary gloss on these songs about flirting and flailing lurk layers of meaning: Beneath the ode to partying at home in sweatpants on "Night In" lies the threat of "drunk boys mumbling 'Can I buy you a drink?'" The love story of "My First Rodeo" also works as a parable of a singer who's spent years being ignored in a town that hands out opportunities like coupons. Then there's the acoustic closer, "Reaching Out," a song about striving for honesty when things aren't going great. "This world is full of stories that look quite like my own," Spencer sings in a whisper. It took too long, but thank God she's finally been given the chance to tell them. ®

FROM TOP: JIMMY FONTAINE; LEONN WARD

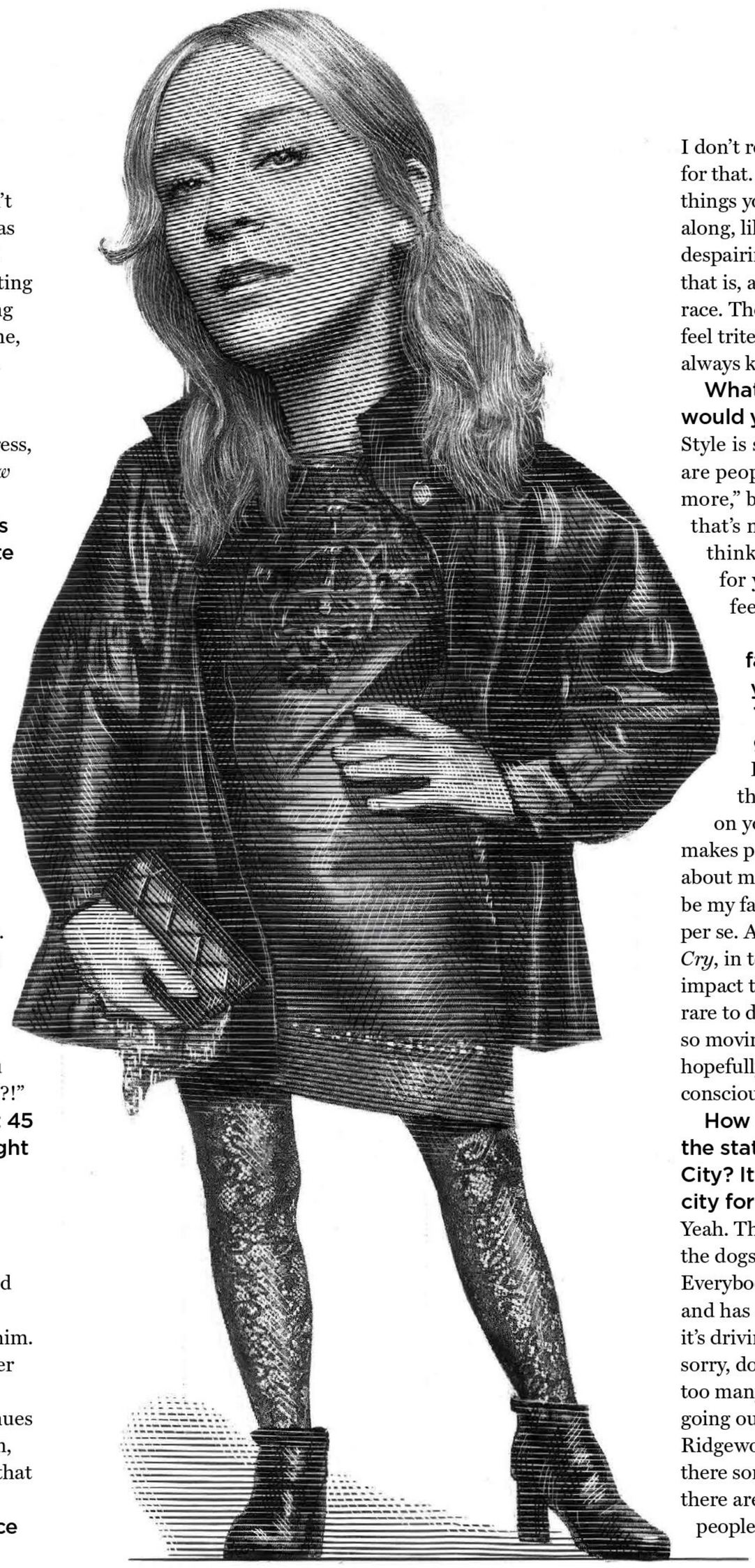
BREAKING

The Last Dinner Party Are Ready to Party

THERE'S SOMETHING fitting about the fact that the Last Dinner Party, a five-woman band from the U.K., came together during the lockdown. Their first single, last year's rapturous "Nothing Matters," sounded like ABBA on a bender. Everything about the *Wuthering Heights* pop on their debut album, *Prelude to Ecstasy,* has a similar sense of release. The Last Dinner Party have been through a gauntlet of buzz, backlash, and a gig opening for the Rolling Stones. But one thing is clear: They want to conquer a messy, enticing world that's newly open for business. DAVID BROWNE

Chloë Sevigny

On working with Ryan Murphy, mean writers, and parenthood



The tagline for *Feud: Capote vs. The Swans* is "The Original Housewives." Do you watch any *Real Housewives*?
I have never watched a single episode of a single *Housewife*. I don't know who any of them are.

'Feud: Capote vs. The Swans' airs Wednesdays at 10 p.m. on FX.

As an actor, what's it like to play in the Ryan Murphy pond?
He's so prolific. I remember when I was first offered *American Horror Story*, it was still Facebook-y days, and I looked it up and saw that all my old alternative weirdo friends were into the show. I was like, "OK, this feels right."

In the show, the Swans meet for regular gossipy lunches. Do you have any regular routines with your girlfriends?
I used to have these girls' nights where I'd only have girlfriends over and we'd drink martinis and talk shit, but that hasn't happened as much now that the small person is always around my house and never leaves [*laughs*]. One of my New Year's resolutions was to start carving out more time for friends.

Your Jay McInerney *New Yorker* profile will turn 30 this fall. How do you feel about it?
It was so odd to be written about before you were even famous for anything, you know? That was the hard part about it for me: I didn't really understand why it was happening. In retrospect, I can, and I think it's interesting to follow a girl who's coming into her own, but at the time, I didn't feel it was justified. I was like, "Why am I even doing this?" [McInerney] promised to buy me this dress, and my father read *The New Yorker*.

This season of *Feud* is all about Truman Capote writing scandalous, exaggerated things about his female friends. Has anyone ever written anything particularly egregious about you?
There was someone who used to write for the [*New York Times*] Styles section, Bob Morris. It was very hurtful, and he wrote some really ugly things. I still think about it. He was like, "She's not that attractive, she's not that smart, and she's not that good at acting." When you're 20 years old and you read that, you're like, "Huh?!"

You had your baby at 45 in May 2020, at the height of the pandemic. What was that like?
It's amazing just to have a baby. I didn't think it was going to happen for me, and then to have this thing ... I can't imagine life without him. And like I said, he just never leaves. He's always around here. I had tried other avenues and not had luck with them, so to naturally conceive at that age is kind of a miracle.

What's the best advice you've ever received?
I don't really have an answer for that. I think there are things you learn as you go along, like comparing and despairing and how unhealthy that is, and running your own race. They're all truisms but feel trite to say out loud, so I'm always kind of "Ugh."

What style advice would you give people?
Style is so personal. There are people that say "Less is more," but I don't know if that's necessarily true. I think whatever is true for you and makes you feel best.

Do you have favorite films that you've been in? There are so many good ones.
I like the impact that *Gummo* has had on young people. That makes people think differently about movies. It might not be my favorite performance, per se. Also, *Boys Don't Cry*, in terms of the social impact that it had. It's so rare to do something that's so moving, eye-opening, and hopefully changes people's consciousness.

How do you feel about the state of New York City? It's increasingly a city for the rich.
Yeah. The athleisure and the dogs are taking over. Everybody's in Lululemon and has a fucking dog, and it's driving me crazy. I'm sorry, dog lovers. There are too many of you. I'm not going out to clubs in Ridgewood, so I'm sure it's there somewhere. I hope there are [cool] places for people to go when they want to. MARLOW STERN

ILLUSTRATION BY **Mark Summers**